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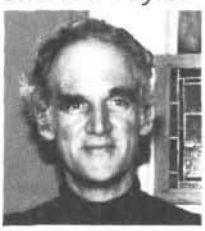

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A magazine of literature and the arts

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TO OUR READERS

A new book of poems by an Advisory Editor of THE HUDSON REVIEW has recently been published. In accordance with our policy, the book will not be reviewed in these pages, but is listed below for the interest of our readers:

HAYDEN CARRUTH: *Tell Me Again How the White Heron Rises and Flies Across the Nacreous River at Twilight Toward the Distant Islands.* New Directions. $8.95p.

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Unsolicited mss will be read according to the following schedule: *Nonfiction*: January 1 through March 31, and October 1 through December 31; *Poetry*: April 1 through September 30; *Fiction*: June 1 through November 30. Unsolicited mss received at other times will be returned unread. Manuscripts submitted by subscribers who so identify themselves will be read throughout the year. Manuscripts will not be returned nor will inquiries be answered unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. No responsibility is assumed for their loss or injury.

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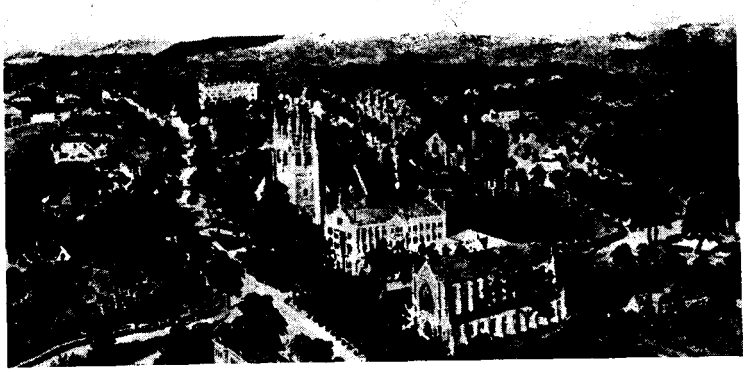

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WENDELL BERRY

An Argument for Diversity

> Elegant solutions will be predicated
> upon the uniqueness of place.
> —John Todd

I live in and have known all my life the northern corner of Henry County, Kentucky. The country here is narrowly creased and folded; it is a varied landscape whose main features are these:

(1) A rolling upland of which some of the soil is excellent and some, because of abuse, is less so. This upland is well suited to mixed farming which was, in fact, traditional to it, but which is less diversified now than it was twenty-five years ago. Some row-cropping is possible here, but even the best-lying ridges are vulnerable to erosion and probably not more than 10% should be broken in any year. It is a kind of land that needs grass and grazing animals, and it is excellent for this use.

(2) Wooded bluffs where the upland breaks over into the valleys of the creeks and the Kentucky River. Along with virtually all of this region, most of these bluffs have been cleared and cropped at one time or another. They should never have been cropped, and because of their extreme vulnerability to erosion they should be logged only with the greatest skill and care. Most of these bluffs are now forested, though not many old growth stands remain.

(3) Slopes of gentler declivity below the bluffs. Some of these slopes are grassed, and, with close care, are maintainable as pasture. Until World War II they were periodically cropped, in a version of slash-and-burn agriculture, which resulted in serious damage by erosion. Now much of this land is covered with trees thirty or forty years old.

(4) Finally, there are the creek and river bottoms, some of which are subject to flooding at varying frequencies. Much of this land is suitable for intensive row-cropping, which, under

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the regime of industrial agriculture, has sometimes been too intensive.

Within these four general divisions, this country is extremely diverse. To familiarity and experience, the landscape divides into many small facets or aspects differentiated by the kind or quality of soil, and by slope, exposure, drainage, rockiness, etc. In the two centuries during which European races have occupied this part of the country, the best of the land has sometimes been well used, under the influence of good times and good intentions. But virtually none of it has escaped ill use under the influence of bad times or ignorance, need or greed. Some of it—the steeper, more marginal areas—has never been well used. Of virtually all of this land it may be said that the national economy has prescribed ways of use but not ways of care. It is now impossible to imagine any immediate way that most of this land might receive excellent care. The economy, as it now is, prescribes plunder of the land owners and abuse of the land.

The connection of the American economy to this place—in comparison, say, to the connection of the American economy to just about any university—has been unregarding and ungenerous. Indeed, the connection has been almost entirely exploitive. It has never been more exploitive than it is now. Increasingly, from the beginning, most of the money made on the products of this place has been made in other places. Increasingly the ablest young people of this place have gone away to receive a college education, which has given them a "professional status" too often understood as a license to predatorize such places as this one that they came from. The destruction of the human community, the local economy, and the natural health of such a place as this is now looked upon, not as a "trade-off," a possibly regrettable "price of progress," but as a good, virtually a national goal.

Recently I heard, on an early morning radio program, a university economist explaining the benefits of off-farm work for farm women: that farm women are increasingly employed off the farm, she said, has made them "full partners" in the farm's economy. Never mind that this is a symptom of economic desperation and great unhappiness on the farm. And never mind the value, which was more than economic, of these women's previous contribution *on* the farm to the farm family's

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life and economy—which was, many of them would have said, a full partnership. *Now* they are "earning 45% of total family income," *now* they are playing "a major role." The 45% and the "major role" are allowed to defray all other costs. That the farm family now furnishes labor and (by its increased consumption) income to the economy that is destroying it is seen simply as an improvement. Thus the abstract and extremely tentative value of money is thoughtlessly allowed to replace the particular and fundamental values of the lives of household and community. Obviously, we need to stop thinking about the economic functions of individuals for a while, and try to learn to think of the economic functions of communities and households. We need to try to understand the long-term economies of places—places, that is, that are considered as dwelling places for humans and their fellow creatures, not as exploitable resources.

What happens when farm people take up "off-farm work"? The immediate result is that they must be replaced by chemicals and machines and other purchases from an economy adverse and antipathetic to farming, which means that the remaining farmers are put under yet greater pressure to abuse their land. If under the pressure of an adverse economy, the soil erodes, soil and water and air are poisoned, the woodlands are wastefully logged, and everything not producing an immediate economic return is neglected, that is apparently understood by most of the society as merely the normal cost of production.

One thing that this means is that the land and its human communities are not being thought about in places of study and leadership, and this failure to think is causing damage. But if one lives in a country place, and if one loves it, one must think about it. Under present circumstances, it is not easy to imagine what might be a proper human economy for the country I have just described. And yet, if one loves it, one must make the attempt; if one loves it, in fact, the attempt is irresistible.

Two facts are immediately apparent. One is that the present local economy, based exclusively on the export of raw materials, like the economies of most rural places, is ruinous. Another is that the influence of a complex, aggressive national economy upon a simple, passive local economy will also be ruinous. In a varied and versatile countryside, fragile in its composition and extremely susceptible to abuse, requiring close human care and

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elaborate human skills, able to produce a great variety of products from its soils, what is needed, obviously, is a highly diversified local economy.

We should be producing the fullest variety of foods to be consumed locally, in the countryside itself and in nearby towns and cities: meats, grains, table vegetables, fruits and nuts, dairy products, poultry and eggs. We should be harvesting a sustainable yield of fish from our ponds and streams. Our woodlands, managed for continuous yields, selectively and carefully logged, should be yielding a variety of timber for a variety of purposes: firewood, fence posts, lumber for building, fine woods for furniture makers.

And we should be adding value locally to these local products. What is needed is not the large factory so dear to the hearts of government "developers" and local "boosters." To set our whole population to making computers or automobiles would be as gross an error as to use the whole countryside for growing corn or Christmas trees or pulpwood; it would discount everything we have to offer as a community and a place; it would despise our talents and capacities as individuals.

We need, instead, a system of decentralized, small-scale industries to transform the products of our fields and woodlands and streams: small creameries, cheese factories, canneries, grain mills, saw mills, furniture factories, and the like. By "small" I mean simply a size that would not be destructive of the appearance, the health, and the quiet of the countryside. If a factory began to "grow" or to be noisy at night or on Sunday, that would mean that another such factory was needed somewhere else. If waste should occur at any point, that would indicate the need for an enterprise of some other sort. If poison or pollution resulted from any enterprise, that would be understood as an indication that something was absolutely wrong, and a correction would be made. Small scale, of course, makes such changes and corrections more thinkable and more possible than does large scale.

I realize that, by now, my argument has crossed a boundary line of which everyone in our "realistic" society is keenly aware. I will be perceived to have crossed over into "utopianism" or fantasy. Unless I take measures to prevent it, I am going to hear

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somebody say, "All that would be very nice, if it were possible. Can't you be realistic?"

Well, let me take measures to prevent it. I am not, I admit, optimistic about the success of this kind of thought. Otherwise, my intention, above all, is to be realistic; I wish to be practical. The question here is simply that of convention. Do I want to be realistic according to the conventions of the industrial economy and the military state, or according to what I know of reality? To me, an economy that sees the life of a community or a place as expendable, and reckons its value only as money, is not acceptable because it is *not* realistic. I am thinking as I believe we must think if we wish to discuss the *best* uses of people, places, and things, and if we wish to give affection some standing in our thoughts.

If we wish to make the *best* use of people, places, and things, then we are going to have to deal with a law that reads about like this: as the quality of use increases, the scale of use (that is, the size of operations) will decline, the tools will become simpler, and the methods and the skills will become more complex. That is a difficult law for us to believe, because we have assumed otherwise for a long time, and yet our experience overwhelmingly suggests that it *is* a law, and that the penalties for disobeying it are severe.

I am making a plea for diversity not only because diversity exists and is pleasant, but because it is necessary and we need more of it. For an example, let me return to the countryside I described at the beginning. From birth, I have been familiar with this place, and have heard it talked about and thought about. For the last twenty-four years I have been increasingly involved in the use and improvement of a little part of it. As a result of some failures and some successes, I have learned some things about it. I am certain, however, that I do not know the best way to use this land. I do not believe that anyone else does. I no longer expect to live to see it come to its best use. But I am beginning to see what is needed, and everywhere the need is for diversity. This is the need of every American rural landscape that I am acquainted with. We need a greater range of species and varieties of plants and animals, of human skills and methods, so that the use may be fitted ever more sensitively and elegantly to the place. Our places, in short, are asking us

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questions, some of them urgent questions, and we do not have the answers.

The answers, if they are to come, and if they are to work, must be developed in the presence of the user and the land; they must be developed to some degree *by* the user *on* the land. The present practice of handing down from on high policies and technologies developed without consideration of the nature and the needs of the land and the people has not worked, and it cannot work. Good agriculture and forestry cannot be "invented" by self-styled smart people in offices and laboratories and then sold at the highest possible profit to the supposedly dumb country people. That is not the way good land use comes about. And it does not matter how the methodologies so developed and handed down are labeled; whether "industrial" or "conventional" or "organic" or "sustainable," the professional or professorial condescension that is blind to the primacy of the union between the individual people and individual places is ruinous. The challenge to the would-be scientists of an ecologically sane agriculture, as David Ehrenfeld has written, is "to provide unique and particular answers to questions about a farmer's unique and particular land." The proper goal, he adds, is *not* merely to "substitute the cult of the benevolent ecologist for the cult of the benevolent sales representative."

The question of what a beloved country is to be used for quickly becomes inseparable from the questions of who is to use it or who is to prescribe its uses, and what will be the ways of using it. If we speak simply of the use of "a country," then only the first question is asked, and it is asked only by its would-be users. It is not until we speak of "a beloved country"—a particular country, particularly loved—that the question about ways of use will arise. It arises because, loving our country, we see where we are, and we see that present ways of use are not adequate. They are not adequate because such local cultures and economies as we had have been stunted or destroyed. As a nation, we have attempted to substitute the *concepts* of "land use," "agribusiness," "development," and the like, for the *culture* of stewardship and husbandry. And this change is not a result merely of economic pressure and adverse social values; it comes also from the state of affairs in our educational system, especially in our universities.

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It is readily evident, once affection is allowed into the discussion of "land use," that the life of the mind, as presently constituted in the universities, is of no help. The sciences are of no help, indeed are destructive, because they work, by principle, outside the demands, checks, and corrections of affection. The problem with this "scientific objectivity" becomes immediately clear when science undertakes to "apply" itself to land use. The problem simply is that land users are using people, places, and things that cannot be well used without affection. To be well used, creatures must be used sympathetically, just as they must be known sympathetically to be well known. The economist to whom it is of no concern whether or not a family loves its farm will almost inevitably aid and abet the destruction of family farming. The "animal scientist" to whom it is of no concern whether or not animals suffer will almost inevitably aid and abet the destruction of the decent old ideal of animal husbandry and, as a consequence, increase the suffering of animals. I hope that my country may be delivered from the remote, cold abstractions of university science.

But "the humanities," as presently constituted in the universities, are of no help either, and indeed, with respect to the use of a beloved country, they too have been destructive. (The closer I have come to using the term "humanities" the less satisfactory it has seemed to me; by it, I mean everything that is not a "science," another unsatisfactory term.) The humanities have been destructive not because they have been misapplied, but because they have been so frequently understood by their academic stewards as not applicable. The scientific ideals of objectivity and specialization have now crept into the humanities and made themselves at home. This has happened, I think, because the humanities have come to be infected with a suspicion of their uselessness or worthlessness in the face of the provability or workability or profitability of the applied sciences. The conviction is now widespread, for instance, that "a work of art" has no purpose but to be itself: "A poem should not mean / But be." Or if it is allowed that a poem has a meaning, then it is a meaning peculiar to its author, its time, or its convention. A poem, in short, is a relic as soon as composed; it can be taught, but it cannot teach. The issue of its truth and pertinence is not raised because literary study is conducted with

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about the same anxiety for "control" as is scientific study. The context of a poem is its text, or the context of its history and criticism as a text. I have not, of course, read all the books or sat in all the classrooms, but my impression is that not much importance is attached to the question of the truth of poems. My impression is that "Comus," for example, is not often taught as an argument with a history and a sequel, with the gravest importance for us in our dilemma now. My impression is that the great works are less and less taught as Ananda Coomaraswamy said they should be: with the recognition "that nothing will have been accomplished unless men's lives are affected and their values changed by what we have to show." My impression is that in the humanities as in the sciences the world is increasingly disallowed as a context. I hope that my country may be delivered from the objectivity of the humanities.

Without a beloved country as context, the arts and the sciences become oriented to the careers of their practitioners, and the intellectual life to intellectual (and bureaucratic) procedures. And so in the universities we see forming an intellectual elite more and more exclusively accomplished in intellectual procedures: promotion, technological innovation, publication, and grant-getting. The context of a beloved country, moreover, implies an academic standard that is not inflatable or deflatable. The standard—the physical, intellectual, political, ecological, economic, and spiritual health of the country—cannot be too high; it is as high, simply, as we have the love, the vision, and the courage to make it.

I would like my country to be seen and known with an attentiveness that is schooled and skilled. I would like it to be loved with a minutely particular affection and loyalty. I would like the work in it to be practical and loving and respectful and forbearing. In order for these things to happen the sciences and the humanities are going to have to come together again in the presence of the practical problems of individual places, and of local knowledge and local love in individual people—people able to see, know, think, feel, and act coherently and well without the modern instinct of deference to the "outside expert."

What should the sciences have to say to a citizen in search of the criteria by which to determine the best use of a beloved

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place or countryside, or of the technical or moral means by which to limit the use of it to its best use? What should the humanities have to say to a scientist—or, for that matter, a citizen—in search of the cultural instructions that might effectively govern the use of a beloved place? These questions or such questions could reunite the sciences and the humanities. That a scientist and an artist can speak and work together in response to such questions I know from my own experience. All that is necessary is a mutuality of concern and a mutual willingness to speak common English. When friends speak across these divisions or out of their "departments," in mutual concern for a beloved country, then it is clear that these diverse disciplines are not "competing interests," as the university structure and academic folklore suggest, but interests with legitimate claims on all minds. It is only when the country becomes an abstraction, a prize of conquest, that these interests compete—though, of course, when that has happened *all* interests compete.

But in order to assure that a beloved country might be lovingly used, the sciences and the humanities will have to do more than mend their divorce at "the university level"; they will also have to mend their divorce from the common culture, by which I do not mean the "popular culture," but rather the low and local wisdom that is now either relegated to the compartments of anthropology or folklore or "oral history," or not attended to at all.

Some time ago, after I had given a lecture at a college in Ohio, a gentleman came up and introduced himself to me as a fellow Kentuckian.

"Where in Kentucky are you from?" I asked.

"Oh, a little place you probably never heard of—North Middletown."

"I *have* heard of North Middletown," I said. "It was the home of my father's great friend and colleague, John W. Jones."

"Well, John W. Jones was my uncle."

I told him then of my father's and my own respect for Mr. Jones.

"I want to tell you a story about Uncle John," he said. And he told me this:

When his Uncle John was president of the bank in North

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Middletown, his policy was to give a loan to any graduate of the North Middletown high school who wanted to go to college and needed the money. This practice caused great consternation to the bank examiners who came and found those unsecured loans on the books, and found no justification for them except for Mr. Jones's conviction that it was right to make them.

As it turned out, it was right in more than principle, for in the many years that Mr. Jones was president of the bank, making those "unsound loans," *all* of the loans were repaid; he never lost a dime on a one of them.

I do not mean to raise here the question of the invariable goodness of a college education, which I doubt. My point in telling this story is that Mr. Jones was acting from a kind of knowledge, inestimably valuable and probably indispensable, that comes out of common culture, and that cannot be taught as a part of the formal curriculum of a school. The students whose education he enabled were not taught it at the colleges they attended. What he knew—and this involved his knowledge of himself, his tradition, his community and everybody in it—was that trust, in the circumstances then present, could beget trustworthiness. This is the kind of knowledge, obviously, that is fundamental to the possibility of community life and to certain good possibilities in the characters of people. Though I don't believe that it can be taught and learned in a university, I think that it should be known about and respected in a university, and I don't know where, in the sciences and the humanities as presently constituted, students would be led to suspect, much less to honor, its possible existence. It is certainly no part of banking or of economics as now taught and practiced. It is a part of community life, which most scientists ignore in their professional pursuits, and which most people in the humanities seem to regard as belonging to a past now useless or lost or dispensed with.

Let me give another, more fundamental example. My brother, who is a lawyer, recently had as a client an elderly man named Bennie Yeary who had farmed for many years a farm of about three hundred acres of hilly and partly forested land. His farm and the road to his house had been damaged by a power company.

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Seeking to determine the value of the land, my brother asked him if he had ever logged his woodlands.

Mr. Yeary answered: "Yes, sir, since 1944 . . . I have never robbed [the land]. I have always just cut a little out where I thought it needed it. I have got as much timber right now, I am satisfied . . . as I had when I started mill runs here in '44."

That we should not rob the land is a principle to be found readily enough in the literary culture. That it came into literature out of the common culture is suggested by the fact that it is commonly phrased in this way by people who have not inherited the literary culture. That we should not rob the land, anyhow, is a principle that can be learned from books. But the ways of living on the land so as not to rob it probably cannot be learned from books, and this is made clear by a further exchange between my brother and Mr. Yeary.

They came to the question of what was involved in the damage to the road, and the old farmer said that the power company had destroyed thirteen or fourteen water breaks. A water break is a low mound of rock and earth built across a hilly road to divert the water out of it. It is a means of preventing erosion both of the roadbed and of the land alongside it, one of the ways of living on the land without robbing it.

"How long . . . had it been since you had those water breaks constructed in there?"

"I had been working on them . . . off and on, for about 12 years, putting them water breaks in. I hauled rocks out of my fields . . . and I would dig out, bury these rocks down, and take the sledgehammer and beat rock in here and make this water break."

The way to make a farm road that will not rob the land cannot be learned from books, then, because the long use of such a road is a part of the proper way of making it, and because the use and improvement of the road are intimately involved with the use and improvement of the place. It is of the utmost importance that the rocks to make the water breaks were hauled from the fields. Mr. Yeary's solution did not, like the typical industrial solution, involve the making of a problem, or a series of problems, elsewhere. It involved the making of a solution elsewhere: the same work that improved the road improved the fields. Such work requires not only correct

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principles, skill, and industry, but a knowledge of local particulars, and many years; it involves slow, small adjustments in response to questions asked by a particular place. And this is true in general of the patterns and structures of a proper human use of a beloved country, as examination of the traditional landscapes of the Old World will readily show: they were made by use as much as by skill.

This implication of use in the making of essential artifacts and the maintenance of the landscape—which are to so large an extent the making and the maintenance of culture—brings us to the inescapable final step in an argument for diversity: the realization that without a diversity of people we cannot maintain a diversity of anything else. By a diversity of people I do not mean a diversity of specialists, but a diversity of people elegantly suited to live in their places and to bring them to their best use, whether the use is that of uselessness, as in a place left wild, or that of the highest sustainable productivity. The most abundant diversity of creatures and ways cannot be maintained in preserves, zoos, museums, and the like, but only in the occupations and the pleasures of an appropriately diversified human economy.

The proper ways of using a beloved country are humanities, I think, and are as complex, difficult, interesting, and worthy as any of the rest. But they defy the present intellectual and academic categories. They are *both* science and art, knowing and doing. Indispensable as these ways are to the success of human life, they have no place and no standing in the present structures of our intellectual life. The purpose, indeed, of the present structures of our intellectual life has been to educate them out of existence. I think I know where in any university my brother's client, Mr. Yeary, would be laughed at or ignored or tape-recorded or classified. I don't know where he would be appropriately honored. The scientific disciplines certainly do not honor him, and the "humane" ones almost as certainly do not. We would have to go some distance back in the literary tradition—back to Thomas Hardy, at least, and before Hardy to Wordsworth—to find the due respect paid to such a person. He *has* been educated almost out of existence, and yet an understanding of his importance and worth would renew the life of the mind in this country, in the university and out.

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CARL WOOTON

All in a Day's Work

I was straightening boxes on the shelves in the stockroom of Stricter's Discount Fashion Shoe Store in Hot Springs. Some guy with a real creamy voice was on the radio getting bent out of shape because it was Friday afternoon. He couldn't breathe without saying, "T.G.I.F." I figured he didn't have to work on Saturday.

Garland Weed, the assistant manager, stuck his head into the aisle of shelves where I was working and said, "Customers!"

I said, "Where's Stricter?" Aaron Stricter owned the shoe store.

"He's out. Get your ass in gear. You've got customers."

That meant one of two things: either we had a sudden rush of business at almost closing time on Friday afternoon (which wasn't likely), or Garland was being a pain in the ass, again (which was most likely). I tapped a last box into place and followed him. There were no customers in the show room and Garland was standing at the front door, rocking back and forth on his heels and watching something going on outside.

I said, "Where are the customers?"

He said, "Look here," and laughed.

I knew I probably didn't want to look, but I went over and stood beside him and looked through the glass door. Two women stood on the curb on our side of the street and looked back toward the other side. They were yelling at another woman trying to cross the street to come meet them. The one trying to cross the street was tall, and her hair was a stringy blonde. She acted drunk. Traffic was pretty heavy right then, and three or four times she looked like she might walk, or spin, or fall right into a moving car. Once she started to go back to the other side. The two on our side of the street yelled at her and got her turned around again. She finally made it to the curb and fell laughing into the arms of the other two. They

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held her up, and the three of them came toward the store. Garland and I both moved away from the door toward the back of the show room.

The women were whores. They practiced their craft and art across the street, upstairs over a hardware store, in a place called Pleasure Palace Rooms. They often came to the store late on Friday afternoons when they knew the Saturday sale tables would be out. Garland used to try to wait on them, but after he found out they probably weren't ever going to buy much of anything we had for sale, and they weren't giving any free samples of what they had for sale, he passed them on to me, like I needed something else to occupy my Friday afternoons, like I needed to shoot myself in the foot.

My father and the three whores walked in together. He even held the door open for them. I hadn't seen him coming. He must have been parking his car while Garland and I were watching the women carry on out in front, and he just happened to walk up at the same time the whores arrived at our door. I remember someone telling me once that luck is just a matter of timing.

The three women headed for the sale tables, and my father walked along the side toward the back. The blonde looked back at Garland and me and said, "Hi, Mark. We came to see what you got on the table."

Hi, Mark! Just like we were old friends, with my father standing on the side in Children's Shoes, smiling. Her name was Mary Ann. I knew her because she was the one who came the most often to check out the stuff on the sale table, and she never bought anything. I had always thought she was kind of pretty, for what I thought whores were supposed to look like.

I said, "Look all you want," but I didn't call her by name. I went to greet my father. He moved over to Tennis and Running.

He said, "I can wait. Take care of your customers."

Garland came over and said, "Go ahead, Mark. I'll keep your father company."

Usually the blonde, Mary Ann, and one or two others came into the store, picked over the shoes on the sale table enough to make me have to straighten them out, and left. Maybe once a

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month, one of them bought something. The first time or two they came after I started working there I must have acted like they bothered me, because the next day Stricter said things like, "Whores need shoes," and once, "Hath not a whore feet?" I got used to them. They hadn't ever caused any problems before.

Mary Ann tripped over one of the little stools I sat on to fit shoes on a customer. She stumbled a couple of times and had to grab the back of a chair to catch her balance.

She said, "Where'd that goddamned thing come from?"

I shoved the stool under a chair out of the way. The other two had stopped looking at shoes and were looking at Mary Ann. I hadn't ever seen either of them before. One was a brunette, I thought probably thirty something. The other one had brown hair, and she was older, maybe old enough to be my mother.

The brunette said, "I told you she's too damned drunk. We shouldn't've brought her."

Mary Ann said, "You go to hell. I'm not too drunk. If I'm too drunk, I'll go to hell with you."

I glanced back at my father and Garland. My father was watching. I couldn't tell what he might be thinking. Garland was grinning.

The oldest one held up a pair of ugly sandals and told Mary Ann, "These are your size. Why don't you try them on? The kid'll help you."

If you think I smarted when Saul Glover called me kid, just imagine how I felt when an old whore did it in front of my father and Garland.

I walked toward them, pointed at the clock on the wall behind the cash register, and said, "Have you found anything you'd like to try on? We close in less than ten minutes."

The brunette held up three different shoes and said, "I want to try these."

She handed me the shoes she wanted to try and sat in one of the chairs, and I pulled out a stool and sat in front of her. I took one of her old shoes off of her foot and put one of the new ones on, a red sandal with straps that tied high above the ankle. No problem. She sat like any proper lady.

Mary Ann went back to one of the tables and started throwing shoes around.

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She shouted, "Where are those red sandals?"

I said, "What size?"

She said, "Seven."

I said, "Maybe you mean these."

She looked at the sandal on the brunette's foot and said, to no one or to everyone, "I'd expect that bitch to take my shoe."

The oldest one said, "Stop talking like that."

The brunette reached down and undid the sandal and handed it back to me. Mary Ann came over and sat in the chair next to the brunette, pulled up her skirt over her knees, and stuck a foot up toward me.

"Try it on," she said.

She gave me her foot and showed me everything because she wasn't wearing anything under her skirt. That kind of thing happens sometimes in the life of a shoe salesman. It had happened to me before. I didn't know how many times exactly, but Garland kept score. He'd run through the curtain into the backroom and almost shout, "Beaver! Beaver!" This time I wished it was him sitting on that stool, looking up a drunk whore's leg at the mystery of the universe. That's what Stricter called it.

I put the red sandal on her foot, wrapped the straps around her ankle, and tied them. She got up and walked around and stood in front of a mirror over by my father and Garland. She sort of pushed herself between them and turned to my father.

"Like it?"

My father said, "It's you."

She said, "Are you his daddy?"

"Yes."

"He's cute."

My father smiled. I sat on the stool and looked for some place to crawl into. I don't know why right then, but I thought of my mother and wondered what she'd say if she saw me and my father being friendly with Mary Ann and two other whores. And my grandmother! Once upon a time before she got old, she would've wanted to hear all about it. Mary Ann went to the table and got the mate to the sandal and brought it to me.

She said, "I'll take them. I'll wear them," and sat in the chair, lifted her foot, and gave me the grand view again.

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The brunette was standing behind her, and she said, "For Christ's sake, why don't you learn to sit right?"

I hurried and put the other sandal on Mary Ann's foot and put her foot down on the floor. I was starting up from the stool when Mary Ann leaned over and said in a whisper meant to be too loud, "It's used, but it's still good."

I didn't need to look to see if anyone—everyone—else in the store had heard.

The brunette said, "Leave him alone."

Mary Ann was still leaning forward, and she said, "Save that black-haired bitch over there for when you're already loaded up on penicillin."

The brunette charged at Mary Ann and got both hands in her blonde hair. She pulled Mary Ann out of the chair just as Stricter walked in.

Stricter bellowed, "What's going on here?"

Neither Mary Ann nor the brunette paid any attention to him. Between them sixteen variations of fury broke loose all at once. They used fists, although it didn't look like many blows really landed very sharply. They grabbed hair, scratched, fell onto and off of chairs, got up and went at each other pushing and pulling and swinging and kicking and yelling names at each other. I doubt if I could remember half the names they called each other, but I sure heard a lot of imaginative suggestions about what they could do to and with various parts of their anatomies.

Stricter yelled, "Garland, call the police."

I expected Stricter to grab hold of them or to do something to stop them, but he just sort of circled around them, not getting close enough to get caught by a flailing fist or a flying foot.

Garland moved toward the display case where the telephone was, but he didn't pick it up to call anyone. I decided I had to do something. Why? Because they were my customers? Because I wanted to impress my father? Stricter? Because I was just dumb? They stopped, as though they were taking a moment to catch their breaths. They faced each other, and I stepped between them.

I said, "That's enough."

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I faced the brunette. I don't know why I faced the brunette instead of Mary Ann. I just did. Friday fate.

I said, "I said that's enough!"

I felt Mary Ann moving behind me, and I turned just my head to see what she was doing. She was just moving aside and half-straightening her clothes. I looked at Mary Ann long enough that I didn't see the brunette take one step back and two to the side. My father later told me she did it just like Rafael Septien. I turned back toward her just in time to see the strain of effort in her face and the blur of her leg as her pointed shoe came up and caught me exactly in the middle between my two big toes. I went down. I thought I would throw up on the carpet. I rolled over and held myself and made strange noises. An incredible pain started between my legs and attacked the back of my head. The pressure of somebody's hands kept me from rolling around, and in a moment the sharp nausea and pain became a dull wave washing over me.

The pressure was from my father holding me down, putting his hand in my belt, pulling up and telling me to suck in air. Stricter got the whores out of the store while I was down. I heard yelling and cursing, but I didn't really know what was going on. My father helped me up into a chair. Garland was still behind the display case. When Stricter had told him to call the police, Garland just ran for cover.

Stricter said, "It's past closing time, Mark. Think you can make it?"

My father said, "I'll buy your supper. I told your momma I wouldn't be home until late tonight. She wanted me to stop and see you."

I wasn't a whole lot interested in supper, but I did want to get out of the store and into some fresher air. It still felt difficult to get a whole breath. I stood and walked and by the time I got to the door, I was up pretty straight. Stricter had walked with us and was holding the door handle to push it open.

He said, "Next time, don't . . ."

I don't know what kind of advice he was going to give me because I looked at him and across at Garland at the same time and said, "Next time, they're all Garland's."

My father suggested we have supper at the cafeteria down

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the street. Since he said he was paying, I agreed. I walked a little stiffly and imagined I felt and probably looked like somebody who had ridden a bucking horse a little too long. I was conscious of a dull ache in my groin and didn't feel much like talking. My father patted me on the back a couple of times, and I could tell he was watching me to make sure I was all right. The air was still damp from the shower, and the wind had turned north and had a chill in it. I looked at my father because I thought he had said something and I realized he was singing.

He was always doing that. It wasn't real loud. Sometimes it was just a kind of soft humming, but you couldn't walk by him without hearing it. People on the sidewalk looked and smiled. And when he started, God only knew when he'd slide out from under the humming and start singing the words to a golden oldie like "Stardust" or even some gospel song he'd sing the bass part of. I tried not to notice him, just walked along like I was by myself. Two older ladies passed us going the other way when we were two doors from the cafeteria.

One said, "Did you hear that?"

The other said, "He must be happy."

"Or funny, you know."

They had blue hair!

His voice rumbled beside me, and out came the bass line of "The Old Rugged Cross." I had a vision of a record album with a picture of him stepping along a sidewalk and the title, *Music to Walk the Street With!* I hurried ahead and opened the door to the cafeteria for him. I hoped I didn't look too much like I was trying to run away from him.

I don't know why they do things like that. Fathers, I mean. You'd think they'd know better, but sometimes it's like they don't have any shame at all. They talk about how proud they are of you and still act sometimes like you weren't even there and embarrass the hell out of you. How do you deal with that except by trying to get ten or fifteen feet ahead, unless you can slide under a crack in the sidewalk? (How often have my own sons felt that way? I really don't want to know.)

The cafeteria wasn't crowded, and we went through the line quickly. My father took a big salad and a glass of iced tea. I loaded up, a free meal. I even took a dish of mustard greens so he could go home and tell my mother I was eating right. We sat

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at a small table against the wall near the door that led upstairs and ate. At least I ate while he sort of nibbled at his salad and watched me.

He said, "You haven't lost your appetite."

"No, sir."

He said, "Do you often have so much excitement in the store?" I thought he was going to laugh, but he sipped at his tea instead.

I said, "No. Most of the time it's pretty dull."

"Where did the girls come from?"

"Across the street. They're whores. They work in the rooming house over the hardware store. The Pleasure Palace Rooms."

He said, "Did you realize the blonde stole the pair of shoes she was trying on?"

I did. I hadn't, not until he said it, then I remembered her old shoes on the floor beside the stool, and the bright red straps I had wrapped around her ankle while I was trying not to look up her leg while I looked up her leg.

I said, "Now that you say it. But even if I had realized it earlier, I don't think I would've chased her across the street to get them back."

He said, "Don't blame you," and laughed softly and looked at me like he knew something I didn't.

I thought I could almost see the wheels turning in his head, wondering how well I really knew Mary Ann, the blonde whore who called me by name. I could have told him I hardly knew her, that the only way I knew her at all was from her coming to the store on Friday afternoons. I could tell him I had never crossed the street and climbed the stairs. I didn't know what he would have thought of that, or what he would have thought if I had. I could have told him I had thought about it. I had thought and thought and thought about it. I had even done it in my imagination hundreds of times, at least, but I hadn't done it really. If he had asked me why, I could have told him the fact was I didn't approve of whores. Truth was, I was scared.

He didn't linger on it, but he kept talking. He talked soft and not very much straight at me. He kept looking around, fiddling with his salad, wiping his mouth with his napkin after just about every bite. He was working up to something serious the way he

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always did. He circled in on it. He talked about things that didn't matter, the weather, the noises his car made at the farthest ends of his territory, where to get the best plate lunches in southern Arkansas, names of people we had known in some of the places we had lived (he remembered everybody) and he looked away from me as though he were searching for something distant.

My father brought himself back from wherever he had gone in that moment and shifted in his chair like he had a gas pain. He tried to smile. He moved his iced tea glass and stirred with his finger in the water ring left on the table.

He said, "When do you think you can come home for a visit?"

I said, "I don't know. I haven't been working here so long that I can get days off when I want them."

He said, "Your mother wants to see you."

It didn't ring right. Not that I didn't believe my mother missed me, but she wouldn't have sent him by to tell me that. If she had been especially eager for me to come home for a visit, she would have said so in one of the letters she wrote every week. It was just another figure in his circling.

He said, "Elizabeth can't last much longer." He hesitated a moment, then added, "The territory is going all to hell."

Decoded: my grandmother was going to die, and my father was wanting to move again. I thought of what Glover had said about my father planning to move to Tulsa and found it an awkwardness, like an unexpected bump in the road, because I had heard it from Saul Glover.

He waited for a reaction, but I didn't have any. He hadn't told me anything I could do anything about, and his words just hung there between us. He made more circles of water with the bottom of his iced tea glass. He put his finger in the middle of one of the circles and made a stirring motion.

My father said, "I called your mother Wednesday night. She said the doctor had come out to see Elizabeth. He said she might go anytime. I've tried to talk your mother into putting her in the hospital."

I said, "She won't do that, will she?"

"She won't hardly say a word to me the rest of the day when I try to bring it up. I understand how she feels, but what's she going to do if it happens while I'm on the road. What the hell

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will I do if it happens when I'm home. I've never seen anyone die before."

And there it was, all laid out on the table surrounded by water rings. The fact was he didn't want Grandma to die at home. The truth was he was scared.

I squirmed in my chair and looked away toward the window and tried to see beyond it into the darkness of the night. It was the first time anyone had ever told me that someone close to me was going to die. My mother had told me in her letters about the things that had happened to my grandmother recently, how my father and mother had taken her for a drive to Petitjean Park to see the mountain, and how on the way home Grandma got lost and thought she was back in Kansas, going to Topeka, and she had stayed lost even in the house in Beckett, thinking all the time she was living with somebody called Tony and Fern. They were cousins who had died before I was born. A car passed beyond the window and lighted up the shadows on the other side of the street.

I said, "Tomorrow's Saturday. I'll catch the bus when I get off work. I can come back Sunday night."

He set his glass on his tray and used his napkin to wipe up the water rings he had been making. He rubbed hard like he could wipe away all that Truth he had put out on the table.

He said, "I better hit the road."

We left the cafeteria and walked back toward the shoe store. He was humming again, but this time it was something so old I didn't recognize it at all. He stopped and looked across the street at the big painted sign that stretched across the building just under the sills of the three second story windows: PLEASURE PALACE ROOMS. The windows were lighted and covered by thin curtains and partially drawn window shades.

He said, "Doesn't look like much of a place."

I said quickly, "I wouldn't know."

He said, "One thing for sure, the business they're in, they don't have to worry about the territory going bad."

We were in front of the semi-darkened shoe store, and I tugged at the front door to make sure it was locked and to show him how much I had a sense of responsibility. I was surprised to see Stricter come through the archway in the back of the

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show room. He waved at me, came to the door, unlocked it and joined us on the sidewalk after he locked the door again.

He said, "How are you feeling?"

It seemed an odd question right then, right there, until I realized he was asking if I had recovered from the brunette's placekick.

I said, "I'm fine. It doesn't hurt anymore."

"Did you know that blonde one took a new pair of shoes without paying for them?"

My father said, "He realized it after I mentioned it, I think."

Stricter smiled. My father looked across the street and added, "I think he decided discretion was the better part of valor."

Stricter laughed and said, "I wouldn't want to go up there either."

Do not ask me why I did what I did next. I don't know if it was because I thought they were laughing at me, or if they had just reminded me of something happening that made me mad, or if I suddenly wanted to prove I wasn't going to let any whore get the best of me. I don't know why I did it, but I said, "Wait here," and ran across the street toward the stairwell. I heard my father shout at me to stop, then Stricter's voice calling my name, but I kept running until I was halfway up the stairs.

The only light on the stairs came from a small yellow bulb over the door at the top. It looked like one of those anti-bug bulbs, but if it was one, it didn't work. There was a crazy pattern of tiny things flying around it, and I felt like one of them being drawn to it. The stairs were old, made of wood and worn away with soft depressions on each side of center. I grabbed the handrail attached to one side of the wall because the stairs were steep, but the handrail was so loose I was afraid to hang onto it. For some crazy reason, or no reason, I wondered what time it was, and I almost went back down the stairs to look at the clock in the jewelry store window across the street. I asked myself what difference would it make what time it was? I had time to do whatever I was going to do. My father and Stricter would wait.

The closer I got to the door at the top of the stairs, the more I thought I even had time not to do whatever I was going to do. I thought like that until I pushed the button on the wall beside the door and from inside heard a chime and a rush of footsteps.

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Maybe there would have been time still to turn and go back down the stairs, but then there wasn't any time because the door opened and a woman I had never seen before was standing in front of me. She was older than the three who had come to the store, older probably, I thought, than my mother even. She had gray hair and wore a long dress that hung straight from her shoulders to the floor.

She said, "What do you want?"

I said, "I want to see Mary Ann."

"How old are you?"

"Old enough."

I wondered if she could tell I was shaking inside.

"Are you sure you know what you're doing?"

I lied, "Of course," and I heard it too loud and too high. If I had tried to say anything else, my voice would have cracked the way it did when I was fourteen.

She smiled and stepped to one side to make room for me. She closed the door behind me and pointed down a narrow hall. I heard women's voices rising and falling from a farther room. She led me in the direction of the voices. At the end of the hall, we walked into a large room that looked like anybody's living room or den. There were two sofas, three or four chairs, even a rocker, a coffee table and end tables with small lamps on them, and a card table in one corner. A half dozen women sat around the room. The woman who had let me in was the only one, besides myself, who was fully dressed. The others all wore only dark-colored, opaque panties and bras, some with fancy lace trims. The room was warm.

The brunette who had been in the store that afternoon sat on a sofa and filed her nails. Two others sat together on the other sofa and read the same page of a newspaper. There were three playing some kind of card game at the card table. One of them chewed gum like a cow working a cud. Mary Ann and the third one who had come to the store were not there. The brunette looked up, saw it was me, smiled, and went back to filing her nails. The ones playing cards put on big smiles and started to get up, but the woman who was dressed motioned for them to sit down and gave me a little push toward a chair.

She said, "Wait here," and I sat in the chair. I liked the chair. It was one of those big, wing-backed things, and I felt like I

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could hide in it. I didn't really need to hide, because the whores in the room paid no attention to me. The ones reading the newspaper must have been reading the comics because one of them said, "Look at what he's doing," and they both giggled. Between the brunette and me was a table with a small lamp that had a dirty orange shade. She laid her wrist on the arm of the sofa to study her fingernails, and I could see the light brown hair on her arm, like strands of fine, silky thread. One of them, maybe all of them, wore some kind of strong perfume, and I sneezed.

One of the gin players said, "Bless you."

"Thanks," I said and was grateful to see the woman in the dress standing at the entrance to the hall and motioning for me to follow her.

I jumped up too fast, and the gin players laughed. I followed her down the hall, and would you believe I said a prayer? It wasn't a big prayer. If I had had time and sense enough I would have tried to do what my mother called storming heaven, sending up a bombardment of petitions and pleas because that, according to her, was how you got God's attention. I went through a door she opened for me and turned around to stare at it when she closed it. I was alone. Mary Ann was nowhere in sight. Neither was any sign of God's attention. All my mother's friends at the Methodist church, and most of them at the various Baptist, United Brethren, Nazarene and Assembly of God churches we had joined in intermittent succession all over the midwest would have said I didn't deserve God's attention in that place. From what I remember about the Presbyterians, they would have said I didn't deserve it in anyplace. Right then I understood it was probably always a lot smarter to ask for help than it was ever to ask for what I deserved.

I was alone in a room that had almost nothing in it except an old, iron bed with one of those cheap-looking ribbed bedspreads that had been washed too much. The floor was linoleum and a small throw rug lay next to one side of the bed. The linoleum and the rug looked faded, washed out, like the bedspread. The only light came from a table lamp on a nightstand by the head of the bed. It was a small lamp with a low wattage bulb in it. It looked like the lamp next to my grandmother's bed, and it gave off the same kind of soft light

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that would make anyone lying on the bed seem at least half in shadow.

A door on one side of the room opened, and Mary Ann appeared. She was naked except for the red sandals with the straps wrapped high around her ankles. She carried a bowl of water in one hand and a bar of soap and a hand towel in the other.

She set the bowl on the nightstand and said, "Come here."

"What for?"

"Everybody gets washed first."

I looked at her. I tried to look and not look at all of her all at once, but I couldn't do it. My eyes kept moving from part to part and stayed longer on some parts than on others. She was beautiful. Her hair fell loosely past her shoulders. Her white skin shone even in the dim light from the small lamp. Her breasts were small, with big brownish nipples. The skin on her stomach was tight, smoother and whiter than I ever thought skin could be. And the hair beneath it made a dark triangle in sharp contrast with the blonde hair on her head. I stared. Even when I moved my eyes, I moved them from one stare to another. I hadn't known anybody looked, could look, like that. I had heard preachers invoke the wrath of hell on women like her, calling them tarnished and soiled. No part of Mary Ann looked soiled or tarnished to me.

She sat on the edge of the bed and removed the red shoes and placed them neatly on the hook rug.

"Come here. I don't have time to play games."

I took a step toward her and said, "All I want is those shoes, or ten dollars."

She shouted, "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Those shoes. You didn't pay for them."

What happened next had to have happened like anything ever happens, in time. Each little part had to happen after some other little part, and it all had to be in time because that's what time is, a number of little things happening all stretched out in a row. That's how time got invented, by somebody doing something that led to another thing that led to something else, but right then it didn't feel like what I was doing was happening in time. It didn't feel like anyone had invented time yet.

Mary Ann reached with both hands for my belt buckle, but I

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surprised her and knelt and grabbed for the shoes with my left hand. I didn't surprise her enough because she moved, kicked one of the shoes under the bed and stepped on my hand holding the other one. She wasn't hurting my hand, but I let go of the shoe when she pressed her naked leg against my shoulder and the stiff hair of her triangle scratched my face. I fell backwards and jumped up.

She said, "You want your shoes back, bring me my old ones. Now, before I start yelling for help, you better get out of here."

That's what I did. I went into the hallway, found the door that led to the outside and started down the stairs two or three at a time. I was nearly to the bottom when I stopped. My father and Stricter were waiting for me. I had left them standing on the sidewalk while I went off to prove my manhood, or something like that, and I was about to walk out of the yellow light with nothing to show for it. I reached in my pocket. I had thirteen dollars, two crumpled up fives and three ones. I put the ones back in my pocket and hit the opening to the stairwell on the run, waving the fives like a flag of triumph. I ran across the street and put the money in Stricter's hand.

He said, "How'd you do it?"

I said, "I just asked her for it."

My father said, "You took a long time just to ask. You sure you didn't ask for anything else while you were up there?"

I got indignant.

"No, sir!"

I probably got too indignant because my father and Stricter smiled at each other.

Stricter said, "I'm impressed. You could have a career as a bill collector."

He shook hands with my father and said, "Enjoyed our talk." He walked away toward the lot where he always parked his car.

My father said, "I've got to get on the road, or your mother's going to spend most of the night worrying about me. I'll give you a lift."

"That's okay. You're going the other way. It's not far."

He said, "Well, see you tomorrow night. I'll kill a chicken Sunday for dinner. That ought to help make your mother happy."

I said, "She probably wouldn't mind if you killed them all."

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"Only got three left."

We shook hands and he got in his car. Just before he pulled out of the parking place, when he had his head out of the window and was looking back for traffic, he looked across the street and upstairs at the curtained windows over the hardware store. A figure passed in front of one of them, then the window shade was pulled the rest of the way down. My father looked at me and again at the windows upstairs across the street and drove away laughing, his voice high and loud on the chill wind funneled up the street. I watched his taillights disappear around the corner and stepped back onto the sidewalk. I turned up the collar on my jacket and hunched into the wind and walked to my rooming house. Every time a car passed me I watched its taillights glow in the darkness, and it seemed I still could hear his laughter echoing up the wide street. He had a hundred miles to go before he got home, and I thought he'd probably laugh all the way. For the life of me, I couldn't figure out what my father thought was so damned funny.

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CARL DJERASSI

The Big Drop

A taciturn man I didn't know sat between me and Sheldon Glashow, the Nobel Prize physicist from Harvard, who had predicted the existence of charmed hadrons. We were on the dais at the "Banquet of the Golden Plate," an award ceremony arranged by an entrepreneurial organization self-anointed *The American Academy of Achievement*. A bevy of "Captains of Achievement" faced a raft of high school super-achievers: National Merit Scholars, All-American halfbacks, star farmers of America, patriotic-art competition winners, America's Junior Miss (sponsored by Coca Cola), the National Spelling Bee champion, and a twelve-year-old named David Glassner, who, according to the illustrated program, had scored a perfect 800 in math on the college entrance exams, wore braces on his teeth, owned a Norwegian elkhound named King, and, of course, ran a paper route. The names of my fellow Captains were mostly unknown to me: Ed Asner, Cicely Tyson, Darrell Griffith, Henry Winkler were only some of the names whose identity I learned later. I hardly watch TV (and didn't own a set until 1985), never go to basketball games, and only occasionally put on earphones when movies are shown on airplanes. I do so much long-distance traveling that I relish that opportunity for uninterrupted reading or writing. Looking up occasionally at the screen more than satisfies my curiosity; as a consequence, though I see a fair number of films in that manner, I don't remember their titles or the names of the actors.

So I was anxious to converse with the few other scientists on the program. But who was this man next to me, the focus of a stream of starry-eyed students, who kept pressing him to sign their programs? Why didn't they ask for our autographs, Glashow's or mine? "Do you live here?" I asked him. For a moment, he seemed startled, as his eyes followed my hand gesture around the banquet hall, until he realized that I meant

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Los Angeles. "Yeah," he stared at me suspiciously. He had hard eyes, a sharp, well-shaped nose, thick sideburns, and a high forehead—not intellectually so, but indicative of incipient balding, which was offset by the dark hair spilling over the back of his collar and part of his ears. The creases on his cheeks looked like the dueling scars of a Prussian officer. He seemed wary, watching my mouth. "Do you work here?" I asked, getting more embarrassed all the time. "Yeah," he nodded, his eyes again narrowing. "What *do* you do?" Glashow asked, the ever-curious physicist. After signing a couple of programs with great flourish and a loud scraping of the pen, the man turned to Glashow. "I work in Hollywood." "You mean the movie industry?" I intervened, trying to be helpful. "Yeah," he admitted, and took a long time signing the next program, as if wondering what to write. "But *what* do you do?" persisted Glashow. "Are you a director?" I added; he certainly didn't seem dashing enough for an actor. "Yeah," he admitted, "I do some directing."

I was ready to resume my earlier conversation with Glashow, but he persisted. "What kind of movies?" Our neighbor replied, "*Play Misty for Me*," and then turned to me, "*Breezy*; *Bronco Billy*." "I see," I said, not having heard of any of these films, but nevertheless impressed. "What did you say your name was?" Glashow asked, saving us from trying to shuffle unobtrusively through the 128 pages of our program. A truly pregnant pause intervened before the man responded: "Eastwood." "How do you do?" said Glashow, proffering his hand, "I'm Shelly Glashow." To this day, I don't know whether "Eastwood" signified anything to Glashow, but to me the simple name meant only that the man didn't have to spell it every time he telephoned for a restaurant reservation, in marked contrast to my own experience. "And I'm Carl Djerassi," I added, and went on, sociably: "Tell me, Mr. Eastwood, why are all these people asking for your autograph?" This brought the first laugh to Clint Eastwood's stern face. "Are you for real?" he challenged me.

Such was my ignorance that, had there been time, I would have told Mr. Eastwood that I also once had something to do with movies. For that misadventure the huge, garish slush-metal medallion dangling from a red, white, and blue ribbon

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that was draped around the neck of each Captain of Achievement was the perfect award. So was the accompanying gilt-edged plate with my name embossed in the center—a suitable vehicle for serving crow.

In 1957 I lay in a bed of the American-British-Cowdray Hospital in Mexico City, having been informed a few months earlier that my knee injury from a skiing accident in 1938 had degenerated to such an extent that I would either have to use crutches and a brace henceforth or else have my knee fused permanently. By then I was in such pain that I lived on 24 aspirins a day; a permanently fused knee without pain seemed preferable to an unfused knee in permanent pain. I heard that Dr. Juan Farill of Mexico City performed in a week more knee fusions than most American surgeons do in a couple of months. Since the Mexican pharmaceutical company where I had worked in the early 1950s, Syntex, had asked me to return as vice president in charge of research, I agreed to a two-year contract, remaining on academic leave from Wayne State University and bringing with me from Detroit several of my post-doctorate fellows. The four weeks I spent in my sunny hospital room were responsible for my entry into movie tycoonship.

Most knee fusions at that time required encasement for many months in a body cast. Dr. Farill—who himself had a fused knee and thus felt empathy for his patients—rather inserted two metal pins into the tibia and femur and clamped them together on the outside, where they penetrated the skin. Immobilized in this manner for about a month, I would require only a walking cast for the remaining period until the knee fusion had healed completely. Once the post-operative pain had passed, I led what was for me a luxurious and languid routine. I was allowed to sleep in the morning until I woke up on my own; after a breakfast of my choice, I listened to chamber music on the hi-fi, submitted to delicious daily head-to-toe sponge baths provided by a young Panamanian nurse, dictated letters to my secretary, made long-distance telephone calls to my graduate students in Detroit, received visitors, read novels, and took unplanned, guiltless siestas. Each evening ended with an opera. I still remember Berg's *Lulu*, and the sophomoric behavior my supine position brought out in me. The incidental music for the

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last act ends with Lulu having her throat slit by Jack the Ripper, the only voice heard in that section being her terrifying scream as she faces her murderer's knife. One night when Lulu was about to be knifed, I twisted the volume all the way up and, as soon as the scream had reverberated all over the hospital, turned the volume down and waited innocently for the terrified "*Que paso?*" panted by the nurse as she burst into my room.

The next morning, the American supervisor of the nursing staff, Betty, appeared. She chastised my juvenile conduct, but soon we became good friends. During one of her visits to my hospital bed, Betty told me about her husband Mike, who was active on the budding Mexican TV scene but whose real ambition it was to write, direct and produce a movie. A few weeks later, during a Sunday drive to Cuernavaca, while my wife and Betty sat in the back seat, Mike told me of his plans. They sounded plausible. Mexico had a fairly extensive film industry, Mike said, with all the requisite infrastructure: studios, technicians, cameramen, gaffers, best boys—the lot. Making movies in Mexico cost only a fraction of what it took in Hollywood, the usual supplier of B-movies for double features at drive-in theatres and provincial emporia, where people went to neck rather than to watch. If the film consisted primarily of sex and suspense, even those few who did watch would be satisfied. Enough S&S would also eliminate the need for expensive color film. According to Mike, even the cheapest B-movie in Hollywood then cost several hundred thousand dollars, whereas a full-fledged film in Mexico could be produced within a middle-sized five-figure budget. Indeed, if one operated outside the union, and offered financial participation in the profits to the chief actors and staff, $30,000 would suffice to provide a satisfying morsel for the insatiable appetite of the *gringos*. "So why don't they do it?" I asked innocently. "Because the local movie industry only makes Spanish movies for the Latino market: Mexico, Latino centers across the border (like in Los Angeles or San Antonio), and other Latin American countries. The real market ought to be the English-speaking one, but the only films made in Mexico for that audience are location blockbusters with stars like Elizabeth Taylor." He looked at me sideways. "So . . ." he said slowly. "So?" I echoed. "What's needed are scripts in English with Mexican locations;

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very few studio shots, which also eliminate most of the union problems; just a couple of key characters who are Americans, with the subsidiary roles written in such a way that they can logically be Mexicans speaking accented English . . . black and white . . . sex and suspense . . . save money and dub . . . hummable music. . . ."

By then, only key phrases were registering; I already had visions of a mini-Metro Goldwyn Mayer enterprise for B-movies, all based on that first $30,000 investment. "Yes, of course," I murmured, "but how does one get such a script?"

"Oh that? Simple. I have one."

Eventually I read Mike's script and, incomprehensible as this now sounds to me, I liked it. I had never perused a film script, but the very first lines sounded like the real stuff: *WILLIE has just taken out a handkerchief. He begins to wipe his mouth. Looking up, he reacts to something o.s. The CAMERA DOLLIES in to a CU. A smirk appears on WILLLIE'S face as he slowly, deliberately. . . .*

Mike only needed part of the money to begin. Within a couple of weeks I'd convinced three friends to join in this guaranteed bonanza. The easiest to persuade was my oldest friend, Gilbert Stork, then professor of chemistry at Columbia University, who knew as little about movies as I. The other two were my colleagues at Syntex: the president, George Rosenkranz, a first-class organic chemist, and Alejandro Zaffaroni, a brilliant Uruguayan biochemist, who held the post of executive vice president, and who even had the foresight to organize a Panamanian holding company called SOXA. "Who knows," he mused, "if this is an *espectacular* success (he always added the Spanish 'e' like in *estupido*) we might as well shelter the profits in a tax haven to fund the next film." We may not have known much about the movie business, but we had learned how to synthesize cortisone and the first steroid oral contraceptive; surely movie production would be a snap.

Reading a film script is like reviewing an architect's rough plans and visualizing the final house. Or what's even more difficult, guessing how it would feel living in it. Mike's script was called (ominously, in retrospect), *The Big Drop*. The story was simple; at that time it seemed convincingly so. An American gangster, Willie, with the help of an American cop turned venal, misappropriates a bundle of money belonging to the

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mob. In a manner not clarified in the script (nor eventually to the viewing public), this money is to be "dropped" in Mexico City, where Willie and his police bodyguard will retrieve it. Matters go awry when the protagonists arrive by train in Mexico, chased by hitmen sent down by the Mafia. In spite of the gangster's honest and stupid younger brother, a charming Mexican whore, and the policeman's new Mexican girlfriend, a series of complications prevent recovery of the money until the final "big drop," which occurs on the very top of Mexico City's 10-story *Monumento a la Revolución*. The gangster falls over the parapet from the top of the monument and is smashed on the pavement.

Unfortunately, things went nearly as bad for the movie's makers. *Item*: Mike's script required two American principals, the gangster and the cop, and a few minor American characters—the pursuing mobsters, the young brother. All other actors could be local Mexicans with a minimal command of English. In the event, the Mexican actors spoke better English than the two "American" principals, whom Mike located after a long search. Both were French. Marc, the cop, spoke passable though heavily accented English. At least his lips moved authentically and thus lent themselves to direct dubbing. But Willie, the gangster, supposedly from Jersey City, was played by a short, hirsute Frenchman, who didn't speak a word of English. His classically Gallic hand gestures and facial expressions might have suited a Mafioso from Marseilles, but not Jersey City. "Don't worry," Mike assured us, "we are dubbing everything to save money. We'll write a special French dialogue for Julien, so his lip movements coincide with the English text." The result was hilarious: English snarls of the "I'll knock your head off" variety were mouthed as "*Je t'aime beaucoup*" or some such affectionate labial equivalent.

Item: Two days into the projected 40-day shooting schedule, while the crew was on location in Morelia, the camera was stolen. Imaginative people can improvise around unexpected disasters, but this camera was the prize possession of the only non-union cameraman in Mexico willing to work for a percentage of future profits. Purchasing a replacement would have blown our entire production budget. After letting us stew for a couple of days, the police chief of Morelia let it be known that

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for an immodest, but not preposterous sum he could recover the equipment. He could recover it, of course, since the camera had been stolen by local police.

Item: The initial shooting didn't take 40 days; it spread over more than eight months. Some of the actors, such as the woman playing the cop's girlfriend, had to find alternative employment during this frequently interrupted marathon. In one scene, the blonde woman kissed her man good-bye. A scene occurring ten minutes later was shot after four months had passed, during which she had dyed her hair black to satisfy the demands of a more lucrative acting assignment that had come her way in the interim. Thus for the second scene she had to wear a kerchief—so tight and all-encompassing, that not a single black strand showed. Even the Ayatollah would have approved.

Item: The final and most gory scene in which the gangster's body comes hurtling down from the sky to crash onto the stony ground had to be reshot. When we watched the rushes of that climax we couldn't believe our eyes. There, in one corner of the picture, admittedly some 40 or 50 feet from the fallen body, sat a worker calmly munching a rolled up *tortilla*. ("Mike," I whispered in the darkness, "maybe he didn't *see* the body falling, but surely he would've *heard* it.")

Item: Had the shooting been completed in 40 or even 80 days, there would have been no problem with the union. We didn't use a studio, the crew was small, and the incentive great for keeping the operation secret. But some time during the eight months of shooting the union had learned about *The Big Drop* and had arranged for an export embargo, though not for confiscation; they assumed quite correctly that there was no market for our masterpiece inside Mexico. Thus we had to resort to illegal means. Whenever any of us flew to the U.S. we stuck a film can or two into our luggage with our shirts and underwear. After several months of such smuggling by driblets, we still had sixteen cans in Mexico City. Gilbert Stork was due for one of his scientific consulting visits from New York, and since he traveled on a Mexican tourist card, there was little risk of his baggage being inspected at the Mexico City airport upon his departure. We packed an entire suitcase with the remaining cans, taking care to label each with the legend *Professor Gilbert Stork, Department of Chemistry, Columbia University*. "Is this an

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educational film?" the inspector at New York's Idlewild Airport asked deferentially upon reading the labels. "Not exactly," replied Gilbert. "Is it pornographic material?" "I wish it were," grinned Gilbert. "Are you going to make any money out of it?" persisted the inspector. "I doubt it," Gilbert said convincingly. "Next," the agent barked and waved *The Big Drop* on its way.

Item: One working print was made in New York and somehow Mike found a few distributors willing to look at our long epic. "What do you think this is, *Gone with the Wind*?" was the most charitable judgment. It became clear to us that the film had to be cut drastically to satisfy the B-market, or any market for that matter, and that the cost of such cutting would be prohibitive in the States. We had to smuggle all thirty-odd film cans back into Mexico. In case there is no statute of limitations for such smuggling offenses, I shall skip the details of that operation.

Item: When the cans arrived back in Mexico City, together with the request for an additional infusion of capital to pay for the cutting, Alex Zaffaroni, demonstrating his business acumen, announced that his stake in *The Big Drop* investment and all corresponding Panamanian SOXA shares were up for sale. No reasonable offers would be refused. Using the same charm I employ when describing potential Ph.D. thesis problems to new graduate students, I contacted another friend about this fantastic opportunity. Elkan Blout was the former research vice president of Polaroid, who had just accepted a professorship in biological chemistry at Harvard. I suspected that his prior experience with Polaroid would make him receptive to a venture dealing with film. Elkan accepted but decided to spread the risk. Would we mind if he took only half of Zaffaroni's equity and brought his brother-in-law, Jack Dreyfus, as another partner to our group? Why not? I thought. Although Dreyfus didn't have a Ph.D., he had founded the Dreyfus Fund and certainly added panache to our group of backers. So *The Big Drop* was edited down to a 75-minute film, and some original music was inserted in the soundtrack. This latest decision delayed completion by over a year, but even now I still consider the music the best part. I have long forgotten the name of the composer, who was freelancing after having supposedly written the music for a Frank Sinatra film, *The Man with the Golden Arm*.

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By the time *The Big Drop* had acquired its final *gestalt*, over four years had elapsed and I was back in the States teaching chemistry at Stanford University. Our new Eastern partners, Blout and Dreyfus, had good connections. The new *Big Drop* was spirited to New York and promptly seen by Warner Brothers, Columbia, and some lesser establishments. My inner defenses let me remember only two of the kinder pronouncements: "This is too arty for a B-movie," and "This is too B-ish for an art movie." (I have a feeling that these messages were first transmitted to Jack Dreyfus, whom the studios did not wish to antagonize.) So we lowered our sights and eventually uncovered a minor film distributor in Georgia, who supplied the rural drive-in theatres. With Northern arrogance, we assumed that the racy *Big Drop* would be a hit among the redneck audiences south of the Mason-Dixon Line, and the money would come rolling in.

We waited for a couple of years. We got nothing; we heard nothing; we couldn't even locate our print. The Georgia distributor had simply evaporated with the film. Around that time, a faculty member from Emory University in Atlanta spent his sabbatical leave in my laboratory at Stanford. Did he know of an attorney (*cheap*, I emphasized) able to help us track down this movie peculator who had absconded with our *Big Drop*? He knew a divorce lawyer, who agreed to take on our case and in the end managed to locate the culprit (prophetically named E. M. Creamer). Our attorney's pithy message (*This is a rural Georgia county, and although Mr. Creamer is not a native, we could have a difficult time there if forced to trial*) concluded with the recommendation that we abandon the suit in return for the film and reimbursement of court costs. Creamer was lucky: the Carroll County Superior Court demanded the princely sum of $14.50 (*anno Domini* 1965). So we dropped the idea of litigation to pick up *The Big Drop*. By then, our Atlanta divorce lawyer was himself bitten by the movie bug. For a modest participation in the future profits, would we let him locate a bona fide distributor in the South? We gave him that option, but all it accomplished was to satisfy the curiosity of the lawyer. He and his potential distributor concluded that *The Big Drop* was not for Georgia. "Too sophisticated," he pronounced.

Nine years had passed from the time I left my hospital bed in

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Mexico City until finally, in Palo Alto, California, I lifted the heavy canister containing all film cans of the only print of *The Big Drop*. By that time all I wanted was to see the complete opus. I'd watched innumerable rushes without sound, some sections with a separate ill-matched soundtrack, but never the complete ur-version or its finely-honed offspring. I felt goose pimples, like a miner holding a glittering rock. There was no question that it contained gold.

I discovered that one could not easily rent a 35-mm film projector for one's home; one had to rent a movie house. My secretary came up with an irresistible bargain: as a faculty member, I could use Stanford's Memorial Auditorium during the Christmas recess at no charge, provided I paid the $6 hourly fee for the student projectionist. For the puny sum of $12, my wife and my two children, who had crossed from childhood into adolescence during *The Big Drop*'s interminable gestation, would see it in the lonely splendor of an 800-seat auditorium. To make the splendor a little less lonely, I invited some company. Before the week had ended, over 500 invitations were mailed through the Stanford inter-departmental mail or posted on bulletin boards: *Carl Djerassi invites you to the world premiere of THE BIG DROP at 8 p.m. in Memorial Auditorium. . . .*

My Walter Mitty vision now came to fruition. Over 400 people showed up: deans, professors, graduate students, friends, friends of friends, the odd passer-by. As I stood in front of the huge screen and described to the hushed audience that they were about to see a film whose odyssey to Palo Alto eclipsed the *Perils of Pauline*; as I, the experienced professor, usually attuned to every glazed look and hidden yawn, sensed their rapt attention, I had a glimpse of what an Oscar presentation in Hollywood might be like. This was the high point of my movie fantasizing. I concluded my tale and deposited myself next to my son, just in front of the dean of our medical school and his physician wife. At a wave of my hand, the trumpet sounds of a Mariachi band resounded and the opening scene of *The Big Drop* lit the screen.

As the movie progressed, I found myself sliding forward in my seat until my head had virtually disappeared behind the back of my seat. It wasn't the dean's desperate question to his

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wife, "Helen, what the hell is going on here?" Long before then, I was asking myself the same question. There was no way to ascribe the disaster unfolding before us to incompetent cutting or to the outmoded fashion of the automobiles or actors' clothes. In fact the decade-long hiatus from conception to debut had given the film whatever traces of charm it possessed. One could only conclude that the original product had been hopeless, that the four Ph.D.'s and the banker had been blinded by avarice. How could one claim suspense when the audience didn't have the foggiest notion what was going on before their very eyes? And how could one talk of sex, when the most erotic scene consisted of the Mexican whore standing primly in front of a four-poster bed wearing a modest nightgown which descended below her knees and displayed just the faintest trace of a cleavage between her ample, but suitably covered breasts? All she did was lick her lips and run her hands slowly up and down one of the bed posters. ("Get it?" Mike had grinned salaciously when we watched the rushes.) But in the intervening decade, the sexual revolution had taken over—influenced in part by the oral contraceptive some of the movie backers had themselves developed—and what might have been sexy in the fifties produced only yawns in the sixties.

As I left the auditorium, I pretended not to see anyone. I focused on my grinning son Dale, who has not often seen his father fail so dismally. "Wasn't the music good?" I kept asking. At least my colleagues and friends had a rare experience, seeing both the very first and very last screening of a movie in the same night.

I could have regaled Clint Eastwood with my story, but maybe an "Academy of Achievement" banquet wasn't the right venue. In any event, this was not the end of my affair with "the industry." If there was a lesson in *The Big Drop*, my son has ignored it. Dale has become a professional filmmaker and with his wife, Isabel Maxwell, a former British TV producer, co-produced a feature film, *'68*, which was released in early 1988. The film deals with the events of 1968 seen through the eyes of a Hungarian immigrant family. All of it was filmed the preceding year on location in San Francisco. At one point Dale needed some extras for a restaurant scene, where a Hungarian birth-

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day party was being held. So I came, together with Alex Zaffaroni (who had moved to Palo Alto, were he founded his own pharmaceutical firm, ALZA). We are both silver-haired, look reasonably distinguished, and still own some clothes from the late sixties. For three hours, we sat in a fake restaurant, playing fake chess, while we reminisced about our adventures in Mexico. I knew this was no star role, but I became convinced of the seriousness of my cameo appearance when one of the assistants interrupted the filming to ask me to remove my digital wristwatch. "Not in 1968!" she reminded me.

'68 opened at a benefit at the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco before an audience of over a thousand. My daughter-in-law's father, Robert Maxwell, is not only a well-known publisher; in the fifties and sixties, he had also produced a series of real art films: *Don Giovanni*, sung at the Salzburg Festival, and *Swan Lake* at the Bolshoi. Shortly after she had married my son, Isabel saw *The Big Drop* and snickered. But now she would realize that not only her father, but also her father-in-law was someone to reckon with in movieland. The first scene of *'68* appeared on the screen: newsreel excerpts of Russian tanks rolling into Budapest in 1956, followed by a view down a hilly street of San Francisco, and the movie was under way. I barely noticed the contortions and fine balancing act of the naked pair copulating on a motorcycle seat. I drummed my fingers nervously with the vintage sixties music while the hippies caroused during a rock concert in Golden Gate Park; I knew that Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy had been assassinated in 1968, and that we would see those shots. But where was the climax? Finally, the restaurant scene came into view, full of boisterous Hungarians, their sing-song accents filling my ears. I spied the director's little daughter near one table. "Shameless nepotism," I thought. As the birthday party started to wind down, as the last guest departed from the restaurant, it dawned on me that no one would ever see the elegant movement of my Seiko-less wrist as I lifted my pawn to capture Alex's queen. Where were those marvelous character shots, which needed no explication in either Magyar or English to make their impact on the audience? On the floor of the cutting room, I was finally told, that's where I had been dropped.

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DAVID DOOLEY

From *O'Keeffe and Stieglitz*

Stieglitz Talking to the Disciples, 1916

"American art, that is what I ask of you,
an art worthy of this land, do I not have the right to ask it?
Paint your pictures and I will hang them,
I will find buyers, but they must be truly your pictures,
shall a young painter be content to mimic the Europeans?
When you have this vast continent, unexplored,
unexplored in the figurative sense, my meaning was quite clear,
the American landscape, these enormous buildings, must you
kiss a raddled whore in Montmartre to think yourself a painter?
But of course you're right to admire Braque and Duchamp and
Kandinsky,
what do you mean, not Kandinsky, he puts emotions on canvas,
that remark was crude and uncalled for, young man,
you want to paint greatly and yet you lack civilization,
think of a man like Goethe, no American can compare with him,
indeed I am not contradicting myself, never
I emphasize never do I contradict myself,
but if you cannot follow the turns of thought in civilized
discourse—
Goethe I say Goethe had the romantic heart, the romantic soul
but an intellect sharp as the scientist's lens,
how dare you say, 'Oh yes, but I am from New Jersey,'
was Weimar Weimar before Goethe made it so?
You must make of New Jersey a second Weimar,
if it is necessary to your genius you will do it, a stoa of
philosophers and artists, yourself a Goethe who goes on
creating,
or learn a lesson from Ibsen, the master builder himself,
he could have stopped, he would still have been great,
but he kept quarrying and quarrying out of himself,

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you speak of baring your soul in paint, is your soul
really that small, can a few paltry canvases, I am not
calling your canvases paltry, contain all of a human soul,
an Ibsen throws out soul here, soul there, and always there is more,

no matter how old or weary he goes on, no no I agree,
John Gabriel Borkman is no Hedda, Hedda we can never forget,
but he goes on, forcing himself to climb his towers and mountains,
When We Dead Awaken, and when shall we who are not dead awaken,
when shall you who are young awaken?" I sat
to one side, dressed in black, and did not speak.
My hair came loose and tumbled around my shoulders.

Stieglitz: Early Photographs of O'Keeffe

The fingers, poised around buttons of bone.
Eyes of an herb woman in a Chinese village.
Luxurious hair wrapped up around her head.
Breasts as white and innocent as her arms.
Light glowing on white flanks.
The shadowy pubis.

Champagne, M'sieu? A poor girl like me
isn't used to such delicacies.
How do I look in your derby hat?
If I let the shirt fall open,
surely no one would object. I think
I would now like a little champagne.
Oh, M'sieu. M'sieu is much too kind.

In a white gown of many folds the woman stands,
her hair dark and flowing. She is ready for tragedy
and will answer to the name Andromache.
Andromache owns the fury of Clytemnestra

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Alfred Stieglitz
GEORGIA O'KEEFFE (1923)

Courtesy: The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, gift of David A
Schulte, 1928

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but will not express it. By this she comprehends
nobility. Her eyes see her child torn from her grasp
and smashed to the rocks below. The loss of a husband
is every woman's lot. You will not hear
the howls of her lamentations.

Here in front of a painting, my love,
I will pose you, a corner of the painting,
they will see this woman is an artist,
her work stretches out of our frame of reference
but we will follow. Can't you hold still, damn it,
another plate ruined. Hold still while I make you immortal,
this is how woman looks when she creates,
no, love, I am wrong, it is you who make me immortal,
you who restore art to one that art had renounced.
To photograph one person over many years, many exposures,
the whole become one photograph of love.

Don't swear at me if you want me to model.
I could be painting instead, you old goat.
Pose me nude in January—you would.
Like this? Yes—I know the expression.
Quick, take your picture.
You can know me and have me for a lifetime
and never begin to tap the mystery.
But every woman should have a lover like you.
I am yours, my love. Enter! Enter!

Lake George

Spring: usually chilly. Lilacs opened heart-shaped leaves among the pine and white birch. Grape shoots were velvety pink. She liked to wade in the streams, hunting for cresses.

June, and the fields dotted with white daisies. Then relatives arrived, his relatives, with their children who even dared to call

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her Aunt Georgia, their scampering around and spying where they did not belong, sister-in-law Selma and her ankle-biting bulldog, meals that demanded small talk and arguments about mother or money, simply to announce one's presence. And his friends couldn't remain in Manhattan or leave behind Cézanne's plastic values and the proper anti-fascist position. Better to climb Prospect Mountain every day, a four-hour excursion, and walk through the grove of white birches.

Autumn was best for painting. Cicadas screeched in the evenings and Canada geese flew over the lake. The air had a crisp northern edge and the maples turned fiery red. At sunrise the trunk of an old birch was bleached white, but the leaves were brilliant gold. By November the sky darkened, heavy clouds drizzled, she was exhausted and pale, painted out, they had to return to the city. The mountain turned brownish-purple except for patches of evergreen.

Observations

1. What can you say to a young painter? Go home and work.

2. Once I was a little girl wondering how to paint moonlight on snow.

3. Sometimes it takes courage to paint a flower.

4. I can't understand people who want something and don't grab for it.

5. A house should be just a shelter. I've sometimes wished for a fire to rid me of possessions. A shell, a stone, a skull—these are enough for decoration.

6. Work is the most interesting thing one knows to do.

7. Why paint something if you don't love it?

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Stieglitz, 1931–32

The man explained to her—he could not stop explaining—
that a true artist like herself didn't have to travel.
I have all the world around me, he would say,
gesturing. Your thin clear air, your New Mexico highlands
would finish my heart. The handkerchief
fluttered around his mouth to ward off germs.
The woman didn't want to believe that categories
like "still vital wife" and "aging husband" applied to them.
She had married a man of wisdom and force and genius.
Chilly days, he wore cape, herringbone coat, sweater
over shirt and tie, woolen underwear, porkpie hat
indoors. He was still a devil with the women,
at least she wondered, he photographed dear little Dorothy
nude in the meadow, vapid as a nymph by Boucher,
though thus far no guilty embrace interrupted,
no lipstick in the bathroom, no whiskers smelling of woman.
When his wife thought of the west, he knew and was afraid.
She arranged the elegant horse skull, desert-white,
and began to paint. Out there, each day arrived clear,
like the ring of a hammer striking something hard.
He liked to say to others when she was present,
there has been one who stood by me, this girl from Texas.
He spoke as if he had not learned that one who accepts disciples
invites abandonment. History was not on his side, the departing
ones
told him, his holy of holies, the artist's fulfillment,
outdated and, worse, bourgeois. Her only solution
was to let the canvases of bone take shape.
She stuck a fabric flower in the empty eye socket.
The two of them held hands and listened to Beethoven.
He photographed her nude, as he had at the first,
her buttocks like sacred objects, heart-shaped,
inviting the touch. From her vantage point on the mesa
the sky would be ripped by half a dozen thunderstorms at once.

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Lake George in Winter

They'd never wintered there. Now she was alone at the lake with only a housekeeper. She couldn't paint. Didn't want to. She couldn't bear even the thought of Alfred. New York was unthinkable.

She did have one visitor. Jean, Jean Toomer, drove up from New York to see her. She didn't mind him, he knew how to be quiet. When she opened the door and saw the look on his face, she whispered, "I've been ill, I've been ill," and fell in his arms.

They existed together quite simply. He wrote in the mornings and then read to her what he'd written. She liked the tints of his skin, caramel, café au lait, the pink undersides of his hands. She liked his long fingers and the gestures they traced in air. He was a Quaker; he spoke once how the external, the color of skin, was unimportant, unreal. The inner light was what mattered. Only the incorporeal was real.

Deep snow drifted around the farmhouse. The world seemed exceedingly pure, dazzlingly bright. They drove the Model T onto the surface of the lake and walked on the wide, glowing expanse till the bitter wind forced them back. Bits of dark green, ranges of brown, and white, white. Cerulean sky. Their breath carried their words out onto the wind. When she grew cold, he took one hand in each of his and rubbed them against each other. The ice could bear so much weight, themselves and the car made no impression. The day was blown glass of finest Venetian work. She showed him her favorite birch.

In the evenings they sat by the fire. She talked, for once, about painting. Realism and abstraction were the same. The purest form of realism led to abstraction. And mere shape, a painter's envisioning of forms, pointed back toward something real. He took her hand. Both of them played with the kittens. The white kitten liked laps, her dress buttons, and his sheaf of manuscript. The firelight falling on Jean. The syllable "Jean" becoming a potent spell.

Oh, he must leave. She knew that, they both knew it. She had

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never imagined this crossroads. He would leave when she said the word. Tomorrow they would walk on the ice again.

After he left, she wrote him every day. I want you, she wrote. Sometimes terribly. But I like it that I am quite apart from you like the snow on the mountain. She did not know if she meant it.

New Mexico

1

at first the hills look small

2

no rain
so the flowers didn't come

3

souvenir of the first summer
a barrel of bones

4

gray hills
all the same size and shape
a hot-colored brown hill

5

the long dark lines of the Pedernal
sky a pale greenish blue
high up, a white moon

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6

the coolness and sweetness of evening
fragrance of the poison jimson weed

7

against the gray mountains
someone had imposed a cross

it was large enough to crucify a man

8

I heard the Penitente songs
and painted the dark crosses

9

the black rocks
have lain a long time
with sun and wind and blowing sand

10

keeping the fire burning
to warm where we intended to sleep

I stood on a rug and wore gloves to paint

reading *Taras Bulba* aloud
hills and stars overhead

11

gray sage, gray wet sand underfoot
gray hills, pale moon
the wind blew the coffee out of our cups

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12

paintings grow by pieces
from what is around

13

low mountains covered with trees
a bare spot near the top
the shape of a leaping deer

14

at sunset the world has a warm glow

15

painting pelvis bones
the blue from holding them against the sky

16

black bird over the snow-capped hills
always there, always going away

17

footmarks
around the dead cedar
he must have been dancing

Ghost Ranch

Come up to the roof! I would say.
If I can climb the ladder at my age, so can you.
Perfectly mad-looking country, isn't it,
hills and cliffs and washes thrown up by God
and left to tumble where they will.
Before the light fades, look at those gouged cliffs to the north—
a giant's sandcastle with saw-toothed turrets and spires.

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Reddish rock at the bottom, then golden
solidified sand dunes, and the top's gray
fossil-filled gypsum and limestone.
See how the light hits the mountains from both front and back,
the distances appear in layers. I love to see my bare hills
glowing like red-hot coals before the abrupt dark.
With luck there'll be a thunderstorm tonight.
Our summer cloudbursts sweep in waterfalls over the rock face
and tumble down the arroyos. Sit down in that chair, I'd say,
I've brought blankets and a lantern and a pitcher of iced fruit juice.
Tell your friends in New York you spent an evening
on the roof of Ghost Ranch looking at the sky.
Rancho de los Brujos, the Spaniards called it,
which means witches, not ghosts. I've seen neither.
Come up here around Easter, though, and you'll hear the Penitentes.
They drag their crosses and cart of death
to an unmarked chapel quite nearby.
I hear their chant, all night their one song of grief,
the high notes of a homemade flute,
the dull thuds of their cactus whips.
Their acts seem natural in a land with more sky than earth.
That painting you liked in the hallway,
the pelvis bone and the egg—why did you like it?
It's not what I wanted at all. What did I want? Not that.
I never paint flowers any more.
Flowers wilt. Bone endures. Tulips often die so beautifully,
I've kept them in bowls while they withered.
A fine moon tonight, large and lopsided,
tinges of rose and almost orange.
Why would you never come here, Alfred?
The journey would not have killed you.
The clouds over Lake George are nothing to these.
In November, chamiso bushes by the road turn golden,
and the wild asters bloom. The first winter I stayed,
I remember the cows and horses grazing among the cottonwoods,
the dark mesa to the east, the jagged pink one to the west.
The very first time I came looking for Ghost Ranch,
these were the directions: follow the road northwest from Espanola,

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turn where you see an animal skull.
I loved the stunted piñons, the junipers and cedars.
I'd bathe in the narrow irrigation ditches.
So many different earth colors,
brown, orange, soft green, Naples yellow, even violet.
I wanted to paint with the hues of this land,
but the ocher soil was too sandy for pigment.
You aged so needlessly, Alfred. Pointlessly!
But our marriage was really very good.
You enjoyed gloom, but I could make you laugh.
I could put up with nonsense from a man
obsessed by truth. After your stroke,
when I left to come back here, you understood.
How could I paint if I stayed to hold your hand?
You told me once that true marriage is tragic;
it leads two people apart.
But we were keenly interested in each other's work.
I wish you'd been here when I did the cloud painting.
Out in the garage, nowhere else would hold it.
Hurrying to beat the cold. Then I'd climb the red hill
before sunset and look down at the cool square of sky.
Milky white. Delicate azure. A kind of glacial light.
I painted the bottom of the canvas on my knees—
what if a snake had slipped in? I have to kill them now
because of the chows. I used to scoop up the rattlers with a shovel
and pitch them outside the patio. Such elegant dogs,
their fluffy plumes, their little coyote trots.
Visitors must be careful. Their teeth are sharp.
I've seen more than one pair of shoes fill with blood.
My dear, I have a curious triumphant feeling about life.
Seeing it bleak. Knowing it so and walking into it fearless
because one has no choice. Enjoying one's consciousness.
You spoiled me for other men, you know.
How sharply the bonelight winks tonight!
Far out in the dark are hills which turn angry red
when a cloud passes. Oh, but in other lights
they are pink as flesh. What will tomorrow's first colors be?
Coral? Peach? Pale yellow? Opalescent blue?
And then the sun will rise.

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DICK ALLEN

Letter from a Connecticut Country House

I

The fuchsia, a clown's umbrella of red and purple tassels,
Sways in its green hanging pot outside our kitchen window
As I type you this letter. It's a mid-June of speedwells
In profusion on our lawn, wild mint and pussytoes
(That ridiculous name!)—and in our tulip trees and poplars,
Bluejays, cardinals, plovers, English sparrows
Live out their wild deliberate lives. . . . It rained
An hour ago but now the sun's come out again.

II

You know each living thing affects all others. Fruitflies
Forced by scientists to grow an extra pair of wings
Pass on that trait. But, months later, double pairs
Of wings appear on that same species taken at a spring
Two hundred miles away—in percentages that raise
Eyebrows, dampen foreheads. Crystallizing
Shapes, perhaps ideas, share the morphogenic fields,
Cocoons of mystery in which our planet's held.

III

That's from my reading, with a little of me thrown in
To ease the Latinate. More and more, I think we're here
Inside a spell, a universal hologram begun
With our agreement: bounce of the second laser
Off the first reflected beam. It's in the pattern
Of the interference where the gray squirrels slur
Across the roof and down the latticework
Behind the fuchsia, search and nibble, then scoot back.

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IV

I think of you often, of your evening jogs, your arms
Zipzapping like a robot's as you lift the pace
Higher and higher, in that park where fountains brim
With leaves and old gum wrappers, and the face
Of Che Guevara stares from a mural by the dim
Light of a street lamp near the ornate underpass
You say is a tunnel of death for junkies, prostitutes.
I hope you've veered off, taken a safer route.

V

I remember, in your park, the faded yellow boats
For hire, the lovers and the tourists and the families
On the evening lake, how Monet it was; the harmonica notes,
Mike-amplified, that hung in the air: apostrophes
Over contractions. Everything about us seemed remote
And near at once, as in love and dreams and other mysteries
We've talked so long about and got so nowhere with,
Certain only of our world's alternatives.

VI

Clouds within clouds within clouds. Yet as I write,
The faucet drips, the refrigerator hums. I was woken
This morning by a great loud gang of crows. They lit
In the trees, on the lawn, on the wall, and finally when
My sleep was completely destroyed, took broad flight
Across the swaying fields. Does anything ever happen
The way we suppose? Is it our suppositions
Which change the patterns from what might have happened?

VII

Who knows? Who knows what we are, and why—and why
Our purpose is so clouded? Che Guevera,
Laminated photographs on cemetery stones, the sky
Filled with crows, our aging unto death, this algebra
Unsolvable? I type this letter. One day, you'll reply

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With other images. I type and watch the fuchsia
Sway in its hanging pot . . . the squirrels. I gather
Information for you but I cannot make it clear.

VIII

Relax to Time and it will teach you, says an old
Zoroaster saying. Relax to your task and your task
Begins to show you what it wants. Let it hold
You in its easy grasp and fill the flask
With flowers cut from it—for the uncontrolled
Arrangements are reflections of the arabesque
Patterns spinning our world. . . . Friend, these words are as
The doubled wings of those mutated flies.

Talking with Poets

Gossip is most of it, a barrier of thorns and small berries
Cultivated to disguise a wall,
False entrances and gates with shallow courtyards behind them,
And sometimes a few gypsies slowly dancing in firelight
Or swinging pails as they take a path down through the forest
To an old mossy well. Small heaps of masks,
And costumes with puffy sleeves or threadbare blouses
Lie beside the moat, are rummaged through
As often as not. But the poets seldom talk
Of forays they've taken; although they are always riding
In and out, mounting or dismounting, holding
The traces, wiping their brows and calling
For strong drink and friends, their verbal reports
Are sketchy, reluctant. No, they would rather laugh
Than speak of high rooms and the maiden's cot,
Books on stone shelves, what shackled prisoners
They may have been shown. . . . Yet if all this sounds
Too romantic, consider the cop coming home
To his house in the suburbs, how he pretends
There are no city streets until he walks their shadows;

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Or the bored-to-death businessman,
The void he plunges daily, rising out of it
Like a circling, wounded hawk, blood under his nails
And in his throat, seeking Lethe
In television comedies or children's homework grades;
Or the doctor who vanishes
Into a nightmare of tumors, splintered bones,
The cardiographic line of a dead horizon,
CAT scans and mottled skin, before she finds herself
Whispering for the mercy of an airplane above layered clouds,
Flirtation, oblivion. . . . Still, if only the poets
Would cease in their talk of grants and reputation,
Reviews, or lack of them, readings, teaching loads,
Editors and enjambment, then on an autumn evening
When the wall is a looming thing of masonry,
Bulwarks and turrets, and a king walks by himself
Under limpid banners, how I would love to hear
(for I have read their books, and like you marvelled),
Of the way they find Blue Sailors by a country road,
Wander in Sibelius, or how they've taught their lines
To study a landscape starting with morning sunlight
Coasting the grass. Talking with poets,
I could be enthralled by cries of Russian wolves,
The smell of vanilla flavoring in an open brown bottle,
What happens when they look at statesmen's eyes—
If only they were not so distrustful, so afraid, so exhausted,
So bent on saving themselves for the perfect man or woman
Who will listen to their voices in another time
More living to them now than these roses, these open palms.

On the New Haven Line

This is the day you might have died
And never heard a newsboy's cry again,
Or looked out from the windows of your train.
This is the day you might have died.

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This is the day news might have flown
By letter, telegraph, or telephone,
To friends from Stony Brook to Riverside.
This is the day you might have died.

This is the day you might decide
To visit Noroton Heights or Sally's Lane.
Because, today, you might have died,
No matter what you lose, you gain.

This is the day you might have died
From natural causes, accident, or suicide:
No more adventures in the great unknown
Of hollyhocks and knucklebone.

This is the day. You might have died
And never seen Rowayton in the rain,
Or morning glories bloom in Darien.
This is the day you might have died.

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ROBERT McDOWELL

The Poetry Anthology

What good does it do? It may celebrate the status quo and attract new readers to the accepted poetry of a particular period; it may introduce the work of young poets, or present the work of a particular school (The Beats, Black Mountain, Language Poets); it may focus on specific occasions (opposition to the Vietnam War, the struggle of Adult Children of Alcoholics); it may gather selections from The Great for convenient appreciation and reference; in our time, especially, it may be used as a classroom text, making available to students a wider range of poets than would otherwise be possible; it may attempt to explain the art of poetry, or make no claims at all; it may consciously appeal to a small, sympathetic readership made up of other writers; it may seek to revise the historical canon, or it may responsibly represent and add to it; it may ignore all considerations of audience, or it may attempt to reach the indifferent audience that finds no immediate reason to attend to poetry.

As our literary history shows, an anthology can be put to one or many of these uses. In 1930, Alfred Kreymborg's *Anthology of American Poetry* (and before that his *Others* anthologies, which grew out of his magazine of the same name) first brought together the work of Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, T. S. Eliot, and other leading Modernist poets. Kreymborg intended to establish the credibility and authority of a new generation and represent the open-ended, dynamic energy of American verse.

In 1929 and 1944, The Modern Library's *A Comprehensive Anthology of American Poetry*, edited by Conrad Aiken, began with Anne Bradstreet and concluded with José Garcia Villa and successfully placed the Modernist generation in the context of our poetry's tradition. Aiken relied on his esthetic judgement to determine the representation that poets and historical periods received, insisting that American poetry was "not yet a great or

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rich poetry." Still, he effectively presented its historical developments, summing up in his introductory remarks that poetry's "whole fascinating confusion with its involved differentials, is simply a process of communal growing . . . And no doubt, in another twenty years, we shall know into what." Any anthologist surveying poetry encounters a "fascinating confusion" he must try to make sense of. A twenty-year comfort zone may be a necessity if an anthology is to have a definitive historical luster about it, but I have said that historical definition is only one goal that an anthology may strive for. During the fifties and sixties, often referred to as the period of the war of the anthologies, this and other issues were hotly debated.

In 1957, the young poet-critics Donald Hall, Robert Pack, and Louis Simpson edited *New Poets of England and America.* In a straightforward one-page introduction, the editors set forth their goals and explained their selection process. Their aim was to represent the poetry of the generation then under forty; in doing so, they relied on esthetic criteria to arrive at "a composite judgement." Presenting the work of fifty-two poets and more than two hundred fifty poems, the editors sought to prove Robert Frost's observation that "All poets I have ever heard of struck their note long before forty . . ." The aggressive response to this book came a few years later with Grove's publication of *The New American Poetry 1945–1960*, edited by Donald Allen. This collection claimed to represent the avant-garde and was made up of poets who had been excluded from the Hall-Pack-Simpson anthology. Supporters of the new volume attacked that book for its traditional, academic bias.

Ever since these two volumes squared off, anthologies have increasingly claimed to represent what is *new*, as if only the present moment spilling into the future mattered, as if what is perpetually new in the old did not count. Given this development, it has become much harder to find an anthology whose editor attempted to combine esthetic judgement and historical perspective in choosing work to be included.

A notable exception, *The Voice That Is Great Within Us*, edited by Hayden Carruth appeared in 1970. This pocketbook of more than seven hundred pages included the work of one hundred thirty-six poets, from the high moderns to contemporaries. In his opening remarks, Carruth aptly addressed the

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difficulty of the anthologist's task. "An anthology at best," he wrote, "is a system of compromises, because its field of interest is inevitably too big to be encompassed by its physical limits." He went on to identify the anthologist as "a worker in time, a kind of historian . . . His aim is the present, but his material is the past." Later, he described how he had included poets whose work "taken as a whole, is repugnant to my taste," feeling that to exclude them would make his book "incomplete." Most other contemporary anthologists have settled for the incomplete.

If we searched for a model of the attitudes which govern today's incomplete anthology, we would arrive at the anthologies of American verse edited by Oscar Williams in the forties and fifties. Williams, the originator and general editor of The Little Treasury Series published by Scribner's, was designated by Robert Lowell, writing in *Sewanee Review*, "probably the best anthologist in America." In his introduction to *The Anthology of American Verse*, Williams argued that "most anthologies of American poetry have been compiled more from the historical point of view than from absolute vision of poetic value." In other words, Williams was determined to rely more on his personal judgement in choosing poems than on any previous critical evaluations. Though this edition represented three centuries of American poetry, the greatest part of the book was given to poets of the twentieth century. The poetry of the preceding two centuries was trivialized, and by extension so was historical perspective. The obvious drawback to Williams' method can be readily perceived by the reader who notices, for instance, that he chose to include fourteen pages of his own work while allowing only six pages to William Carlos Williams. No doubt the anthologist believed in his "absolute vision of poetic value," but he clearly lacked what Kreymborg called the confident critic's "essential detachment." The Oscar Williams anthologies did, however, point the contemporary anthology in the direction of the classroom and make viable the sort of thinking that might be summed up by the declaration *current is good.*

One need not travel far from such an assumption to arrive at a place where *new* and *young* take on a primary importance. In 1968, Paul Carroll's *The Young American Poets* included fifty-four poets who were thirty-five or younger. Carroll wished to present the work of a generation yet to be defined, and in the

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introduction James Dickey described them: "Most of these poets do not seem to be as informed or well-read as some of the best poets who immediately preceded them." At the same time, he allowed how they knew "one *big* thing: what it is to *be*, in a particular skin and at a particular time and place; and what it is like to respond with directness and passion, beyond or to the side of established literary precedent." Mark Strand got to the point a lot faster a year later in the introduction to his own *The Contemporary American Poets: American Poetry Since 1940*: "Many of today's poets have made, if not a cult, at least a lifetime's work of the self."

By the mid-seventies, the anthology compiled from personal taste, eschewing criticism yet aimed at the classroom, and including seemingly everyone, had become standard and remains so now. Representative examples include *Naked Poetry* and *The New Naked Poetry* (1976) edited by Stephen Berg and Robert Mezey, *A Geography of Poets* (1979) edited by Edward Field, *The American Poetry Anthology* (1975) edited by Daniel Halpern, and *The Longman Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry 1950–1980* (1983) edited by Stuart Friebert and David Young. The concluding remarks from Berg and Mezey's introduction speaks for all anthologists of the period: ". . . here, in order to make a little money, to enlarge the audience for poets we love, and to provide an interesting text for ourselves and other teachers, we have collected all these poems, all these genres, into a book." It is not difficult or inaccurate to detect in the Strand and Berg-Mezey quotes a cynical pragmatism that is willing to accommodate the coarser elements of public relations. As more and more poetry in this country is made available to a largely indifferent audience, the need to call attention to one's enterprise takes on an aura of thinly disguised desperation. To attract any attention at all, many poets believe (and most of the anthologists I have referred to are also poets) that they must be different *with a difference*, for they cannot rely on the classical distinction that views the poet as the blessed man or woman both apart from, and part of, our culture. Appropriating a term from television, film, advertising, and major trade publishing, these poets have "gone commercial" in packaging and presenting their wares. Thus the emphasis on *new* and *young*.

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The signs that we lack anything resembling a critical consensus in poetry have been with us for decades. Criticism has been suspect since the fifties, and is welcomed by most poets only when it praises. In the last thirty-five years, we have seen fewer acknowledged poet-critics reviewing poetry in our journals and newspapers, and in books of essays and reviews.[1] Exceptions include Donald Hall, Louis Simpson, and a few others who continue to produce criticism that attempts to make sense of contemporary poetry's place in the tradition. But it is venerable poets like James Dickey and Richard Howard, who have stopped writing criticism altogether, who unfortunately represent the majority. Publishers and editors share with poets some responsibility for this situation, for no American newspapers or slick magazines review poetry on a regular basis; even many literary magazines and quarterlies review poetry only infrequently. But this has little to do with the fact that most poets shy away from committing their opinions to print, fearing that to do so would jeopardize their reputations. Where poets once wrote criticism, in part, to supplement their income, today they teach in universities to accomplish the same purpose. What is lost is the necessary formal dialogue that furthers the development of literature by eventually distinguishing exceptional work from the mediocre.

With the egocentric drive that is characteristic of the age, anthologists have fallen into step, cutting the legs out from under historical perspective and dressing up personal, ephemeral tastes and loyalties as esthetic judgements. They seem to be trying to persuade us that their selection of some poems and rejection of others is enough in itself to be considered a meritorious act of literary criticism. Even in an age of lowered standards, anthologists do reflect their own time.

A close examination of four recent anthologies will further illustrate both the strengths and weaknesses of the contemporary anthology.

The Morrow Anthology of Younger American Poets,[2] edited by

[1] I do not include here the efforts of the younger generation of poet-critics such as Bruce Bawer, Tom Disch, Dana Gioia, Mark Jarman, David Lehman, William Logan, and others; their impact is just being felt, but they had no effect on the situation I describe in the sixties, seventies, and early eighties.

[2] THE MORROW ANTHOLOGY OF YOUNGER AMERICAN POETS, ed. by *Dave Smith* and *David Bottoms*. Quill Books. $17.95p.

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Dave Smith and David Bottoms, first appeared in 1985. In sheer length (796 pages) and content (104 poets), this book epitomizes what can only be called the anthology of mainstream academic poetry. Though some good poets, and poems, are included, they are virtually lost in the stampede of the mediocre that gives this anthology what character it can lay claim to.

In addition to an effusive, blurbspeak introduction by Anthony Hecht, the editors reveal much about themselves and their editorial methods in opening comments of their own. Describing themselves as "relentless readers of new poems," Smith and Bottoms explain how they had originally envisioned a book "beginning with Lowell and Roethke and including those contemporaries, now in their fifth and sixth decades, who had altered the directions of American poetry with their first books in the fifties and sixties." But steep permission fees discouraged such a plan. So the editors agreed with the publisher that a new book collecting the work of younger poets "was badly needed." The editors thought this "an easy enough task," but soon discovered that they "would have to establish guidelines for selection, the fewer the better." The guidelines are few indeed, and consist of the following: the editors must *like* the poems, poets selected must have one full-length book publication to their credit, and must not have been born prior to 1940. These standards, if we can call them standards, firmly place this book in the family tree with Oscar Williams and his offspring of the sixties and seventies. Historical perspective is ignored (one senses from their introduction that the editors would not be up to a serious historical appraisal even if they wished to include one), esthetic criteria are transformed into a test of the poem's ability to appeal amiably to the editors' personal taste, and specious public relations, not literary criticism or appreciation, must be the governing force behind the book as a whole. As the editors say, "We have tried to represent the most attractive of the younger poets . . ."

The emphasis on attractiveness (one might ask to whom), amiability, and a slick, deceptive definition of youth confronts the reader on every page of this text. This last point demands some comment. As America ages, it becomes more obsessed with youth. Apparently, as long as our middle-aged poets continue to construct and publish their own anthologies, they

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will insist that they are still young. But any honest forty-five-year-old man or woman knows better and would dispute the underlying assumption that youth is desirable in all things. To these editors, what *appears* to be *new* and *young* is everything, but they seldom include good examples of either. What they have done is put together a weighty textbook anthology of poets, some young and some decidedly not so young, almost all of whom possess degrees in writing and now teach writing in universities. One would not be missing the point if reminded of a handbook for a closed club that contains no variety, few surprises, and little contentiousness. The piling on of derivative verse obscures the few worthy poems by writers like Ai, Rita Dove, Garrett Hongo, T. R. Hummer, Sydney Lea, David St. John, Michael Waters, and some others.

But how might this anthology have been a better book? Each poet should have been represented by only one or two poems, for it is a sure bet that better than ninety-eight percent of the poems presently included will not be remembered. At least half of the poets included should have been left out, and I am probably too generous with this estimate. Also, including some poems, and poets, that the editors did not like would no doubt have improved the book's overall impression. Finally, given the anthology's title, a cutoff birth date of 1950, not 1940, should have been imposed. Unfortunately, not one of these steps was taken. If future editions of this book appear, at least the title could be changed to reflect with more accuracy the tone and content of the material. I suggest *The Morrow Anthology of Attractive Middle-Aged and Younger American Professor Poets.* It's a mouthful, I know, but that is precisely what the book showcases.

Andrei Codrescu's *American Poetry Since 1970: Up Late*[3] most actively seeks to recreate the role played by Donald Allen's anthology in 1960, with every other anthology that the editor can think of cast in the role of the Hall-Pack-Simpson book. In his introduction, Codrescu slams a number of competitive anthologies, beginning with Hall-Pack-Simpson, which favored "closed poems" and a "proper" demeanor; Paul Carroll's anthology failed because "it was conciliatory rather than partisan

[3] AMERICAN POETRY SINCE 1970: Up Late, ed. by *Andrei Codrescu.* 4 Walls 8 Windows. $23.95; $14.95.

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. . . and gave the green light to 'poets' rather than poetry"; the Morrow anthology consists of poets "keeping up the class spirit with the conventional shorthand of the Workshop."

These are strong denouncements, but Codrescu's abundant persecuting fervor covers much more, most importantly the National Endowment for the Arts and poets with degrees who landed most of the teaching jobs in the mid-seventies. Lamenting the diminishing influence of the Allen anthology, Codrescu complains that today "the academics are back in the saddle," spreading their influence through the writing programs. At the same time, he schizophrenically declares that the last two decades have given us the most vibrant years in American poetry. "We have seen the emergence of black, feminist, gay and ethnic poetries . . . Poetic experiment flourished. Poets began collaborating with sound, and also with music and other arts."

To draw a bead on just how unreliable Codrescu the historian can be, I want to consider these claims. It is true that our poetry, in recent years, has seen a profusion of work from segments of the population that were excluded before. This poetry has come to our attention, in large part, thanks to the "quantitative fairness" which Codrescu ridicules earlier in his introduction; to say that experiment in poetry "flourished" over the last two decades distorts the facts, for any "experiment," in any school, taking place in the last two decades can easily discover its origins in the international poetry of this century's first thirty years; next, all poets, even bad ones, have *always* collaborated with sound; finally, who could possibly believe that poets began to pay attention to music and to other arts only in the last two decades?

These inaccuracies, and countless others like them, must call into question the integrity of the anthology itself, and the integrity and knowledge of its editor. On this matter, I believe Codrescu knows the score but will deliberately distort the facts to play to what he believes the audience wants. An obvious example occurs in the copy on the back cover: "With several significant exceptions . . . the poets represent the under forty generation." In fact, more than sixty percent of the 104 poets in the anthology are over forty. The average age of all of them is forty-four. A contradiction like this suggests that Codrescu's pragmatic cynicism easily matches Dave Smith's and David

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Bottoms'. It also suggests how much Codrescu has in common with these editors, and how much his anthology is like their book. In fact, *Up Late* more closely resembles the Morrow than any other anthology published in the last twenty years. They are related by their practice of including everyone while claiming moral and esthetic exclusivity, and by distortion of historical fact. When Codrescu says that "the making of community against anti-social technology is the chief object of the poetry gathered here," and that "Popular culture as it appears in these poems has been deconstructed for communal use," we can easily imagine the Morrow editors saying the same things. The only substantive difference between these two books is the roster of names. Codrescu's includes the likes of Ted Berrigan, Philip Lamantia, Anne Waldman, Ron Padgett, David Antin, and John Yau. The editor describes the complete line-up in this way: "There are second and third generation New York School Poets here, California Zen Surrealists, performance and 'new wave' poets, erotic lyricists and 'language' poets, in short, all that is new now." As with the editors of Morrow and other recent anthologies, we meet again that buzz word, *new*.

But as in that and other anthologies, the word *new* alone cannot make golden the abundance of imitative, tin writing here. In performance, David Antin can be very entertaining; on the page he's a bore. Throughout this book, poem after poem reads like someone's journal entry or hastily composed list. Occasionally, a poet will reveal more about himself and his colleagues than he perhaps meant to. The last line of Codrescu's "Against Meaning," for instance, reads "God watches us faking it," and Ron Padgett concludes "Voice" with "I / wish to remain a phony the rest of my life." Against the weight of so much writing like this, the few interesting poems by David Trinidad, William Hathaway, and Terence Winch are all but lost.

Apparently, as editor, Codrescu gets too wrapped up in his own rhetoric to see this problem. "The true poets are operating today in a field larger than the narrows of academic or political succession." This frame of mind is comparable to that of the high profile spokespeople of the New Right extolling the virtues of "true believers." But perhaps I whip a false prophet to excess. Because Codrescu feigns attacking what he actually is,

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it is hard to take him seriously. Rather, I keep thinking of Louis Simpson's comment as he looked back at the "avant-garde" poets represented in Donald Allen's anthology: "Now, thirty years later, some of the 'new American poets' look very old—they have been become members of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters." Despite Codrescu's ranting against academics, a great many of the poets in *Up Late* teach, many in writing programs. Doubtless in time the doors to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters will swing open to admit some of them. They will probably walk in arm-in-arm with poets who appeared in the Morrow book.

Robert Richman's *The Direction of Poetry*[4] differs from the Morrow and Codrescu books. Only in this collection, among those under discussion here, has some serious attempt at selectivity been made, as its length (168 pages) and line-up (76 poets from the U.S., Britain, Canada, Australia, and the West Indies) suggest. The book's cover announces its intention to represent "rhymed and metered verse written in the English language since 1975." The tone of Richman's introduction is also different. For one thing, he begins by addressing "The General Reader, who has all but given up on contemporary poetry as a source of pleasure." This is not the tone of the cynical pragmatist holding forth from his booth in the closed club, and it is refreshing to find an anthology that has tried to keep that general reader in mind.

As for the poets, Richman states that "all are united in their use of metered language . . . Stress and syllable-stress are therefore the dominant metrical forms the reader will encounter in these pages." Basing his choices on his judgement of literary quality, Richman gives examples in his introduction of what he means, quoting passages from Anne Stevenson's "Making Poetry," Derek Walcott's "The Young Wife," and Timothy Steele's "Aurora." This editor is even clear about what he chose to leave out. "Quantitative syllabic poetry," for example, is excluded because it has no regular stress pattern; syllabic poems that have been included "are all enlivened by the addition of stress and rhyme patterns." Richman also omits

[4] THE DIRECTION OF POETRY, ed. by *Robert Richman*. Houghton Mifflin. $12.95p.

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Amy Clampitt, making the useful point that she "seldom writes metrically."

What he does include, however, is more than enough to entertain and instruct the reader. Stressing that meter is "a powerful and effective means to an end . . . but not an end in itself," Richman begins with Fleur Adcock and Elizabeth Bishop, and chooses poems wisely, for the most part, limiting many poets to two poems, and allowing three poems to only eight. Giving weight to the argument that less can be more, Richman chooses excellent poems from abroad by Stevenson, Walcott, Andrew Motion, Jeffrey Wainwright, Douglas Dunn, Leslie Norris, and especially Tony Harrison. He also chooses well from a wide range of American poets, from generations as remote from each other as Robert Penn Warren's and Gjertrud Schnackenberg's. Obviously, Richman has brought historical perspective to the task at hand. His esthetic judgement stands up well, too, except for one problem.

The problem is that *The Direction of Poetry* contains several poems that cannot be scanned according to the methods passed on from Marlowe to Shakespeare to Milton to Pope to Wordsworth to Keats to Frost to Stevens, and so on. Examples include Peter Davison's "Questions of Swimming, 1935," Dana Gioia's "California Hills in August," Edward Hirsch's "Fast Break," Michael Blumenthal's "Inventors," and Donald Hall's two poems. Some of these are very good poems, but they are not metrical. This problem must be traced to some confusion on Richman's part over the differences between rhythm and meter, and meter and form. It is a confusion shared by many writers and readers of poetry since Brooks and Warren blurred the distinctions back in the thirties. Any successful poem, be it in traditional meter or free verse, achieves its own form and can be loosely called a formal poem. This classification is no corruption of form's concept, but a simple statement that Shakespeare, Eliot, and other poets would agree with. The poem written in a regular meter must adhere to concrete rules governing the manipulation of that meter. The degree to which the poet creates variation *within the rules* goes a long way toward determining the success of the poem. The successful poem written in a regular meter is formal; if it is unsuccessful, it is just a failed poem. Richman clouds this issue when he commits a

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common error by saying that "the return to musicality is tied to a recent upsurge among poets in the use of metrical language." This connection has never been clear to me, and such references to music in poetry tend to rub out the very real distinctions between rhythm and meter, imagery and content. I wish that Richman had written more about the organizing principle of the metrical poem, and the distinction between the verse line and the prose sentence.

Still, he has given us one of the more readable and enjoyable anthologies of the last thirty years. When he insists that meter must continue to be "a flexible and rewarding accompaniment to the idioms, perceptions, and emotions of our time . . . ," we can easily agree. Except for the inclusion of some poems that are not metrical, there is very little in this book to dislike, and much to be grateful for.

In *The Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry*,[5] critic Helen Vendler devotes 440 pages to 35 poets. It is very much a book that honors celebrity and attractiveness, and in this way, and this way only, it is similar to the Morrow anthology. Vendler includes the honored dead like Wallace Stevens, Frank O'Hara, Robert Lowell, and Elizabeth Bishop, the honored old and middle-aged such as Howard Nemerov, Richard Wilbur, Gary Snyder, and Dave Smith, and even some honored young like Michael Blumenthal, Rita Dove, and Jorie Graham. All of the poets in the book, at one time or another in the last thirty years, have been the rage in the writing programs and the academy. This appears to be Vendler's major criterion for selection. That she leaves out most of the contemporary poets who have written our best poetry over the same period of time is apparently beside the point. In an age that honors the individual more than the work, it should not be surprising that under the guise of a comprehensive American poetry anthology, Helen Vendler would give us *The Vendler Reader*. As she says early in her introduction, her choices are based on "what seems to my taste satisfying." This approach would give the editors of the Morrow anthology no trouble at all, but one

[5] THE HARVARD BOOK OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY, ed. by *Helen Vendler*. Belknap/Harvard. $20.00.

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assumes that an editor like Hayden Carruth would find her criteria irresponsibly vague and subjective.

They are. One might consider the ample selection from Stevens, which begins the book. Vendler explains her bizarre starting point by claiming that Stevens "flowered late," after 1955 and the appearance of *Collected Poems*. This opinion conveniently revises the historical facts, allowing Vendler to argue, unconvincingly, that the other poets in her book (and all contemporary poets who are worth anything) have more in common with Stevens than with any of the other high modern poets. What she does not admit is that Stevens is included because he is the most important poet of that generation *to her*. Of course, to do so might call into question the critical integrity of the anthology and essential detachment of its maker.

Vendler would not care to create that impression, because she has found a high profile niche in academia as a poetry critic. She plays this role by collecting and partially assimilating the positions and arguments of many more creative thinkers to promote a particular program. This program appears to call for a redefinition and full promotion of the lyric, and the adoption of non-linear thought and expression. "Lyric poetry—for all its plot," she says (and one might wonder what she means by "plot" here), "its logic, its conclusions—is profoundly unlinear." If this attempt at revision is intentional, then it is insidious; if it is unintentional, it is the result of ignorance. One problem with Vendler the critic of contemporary poetry is that one can never be quite sure when she knows what she is doing.

Here is an example from her introduction of this thinking, or non-thinking. "One of the most interesting of recent formal changes is the alteration that has taken place in the way poets end poems. Resounding closure—like the providential teleology of which it is the formal counterpart—no longer seems 'true.' A diffuseness and 'evenness' of aura tends to spread round the close of poems, which dissolve rather than end. A tentativeness of gesture corresponds to what must be, in a pluralistic society, an inevitable pluralism of view." In one frightening paragraph, Vendler notices that more poems seem open-ended in their conclusions. She refers to this as a "recent" change. One wonders how closely she has read the high moderns, who were ending poems this way quite often seventy

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years ago. But by the time Vendler has mashed together poetic form with the character of a pluralistic society, we should realize that this critic will say anything to back up her one point—that linear thought and expression in poetry are dead.

Linear poetry has been replaced, Vendler believes, by the poem that constantly reminds the reader of its limitations even as it "will provoke that sharp and relieving pang—Heavens, I recognize the place, I know it!" But earlier she had written "This truth—that we live in the poem's world, not it in ours—applies not only to *symbolic* poems." This contradicts the exclamatory sentence above, for one cannot say "I recognize the place, I know it!" unless one has *known* it. The poem must exist in our world before we can enter its own. This is what T. S. Eliot meant by the poetry of a people taking its life from the people's speech *and in turn* giving life back to it. The methods of constructing that bridge of sensibility by laws of sequence that must be followed are precisely the methods that elude a scholar like Vendler.

If one requires further evidence of Vendler's unreliable subjectivity as a critic and anthologist, there is much more that could be dwelt on. One might contrast Vendler's inclusion of Stevens with that of Michael Blumenthal. No one should deny Stevens' greatness, just as no one should deny that Blumenthal has never managed to write two consecutive lines of poetry in his life. What does the inclusion of Blumenthal along with Stevens tell us about the sensibility and integrity of the editor of this anthology?

It may tell us that Blumenthal has taught at Harvard with Vendler. It may also suggest that Vendler suffers from a peculiar provincialism, which Harvard's connection with this book and many of its authors seems to support. Then again, this chummy collegiality may all be in keeping with the spirit of the age. It would not surprise me to see, any day now, the *University of Iowa Book of American Verse*, or *American Poetry: Missoula Style*. Nor would it surprise me that Helen Vendler, if asked, would have a go at editing them. As a vessel of received opinions, she has no peer on the current scene. But I would advise the powers that be, before asking her to edit anything else, to consider the following paragraphs, which appear on the

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final page of her introduction. The first is by Vendler; the second, which I referred to earlier, is by T. S. Eliot.

> The symbolic strength of poetry consists in giving presence, through linguistic signs, to absent realities, while insisting, by the very brilliance of poetic style, on the linguistic nature of its own being and the illusionistic character of its effects.

> The poetry of a people takes its life from the people's speech and in turn gives life to it; and represents its highest point of consciousness, its greatest power and its most delicate sensibility.

Recognize the difference, in thought and expression, between these two sentences, and you understand why Eliot, late in life, declared that the only criticism important to him was criticism written by other poets.

If future anthologists are to do better, they must buck the current habit of elevating personalities above the work itself. It would help if they were more honest, less timid and self-aggrandizing. They should grow old with as much grace as they can muster, and if this is impossible they should at least admit that they are getting older when the time comes. If they are also to be poets, it would be better if they had already established a legitimate track record in editing, or in writing essays and reviews; such work would strongly imply that they had rejected the dissolution of critical consensus and stood for rigorous, higher standards in judging poetry, or any art. Historical perspective and clearly articulated esthetic criteria should play strong roles in any anthologist's work. If the anthology is broad in its range and claims, then good work not to the anthologist's personal taste should also be included. Such a commitment to fairness would go a long way toward proving that the work, not the power of personality, was most important in the process. Both the broad anthology and the anthology of special interest should include fewer poets, and often those poets should be represented by only a few strong poems. We could do without so many anthologies, and we could use some very good ones. Though it's not likely that any of these things will be done soon, I am optimistic enough to believe that, in time, some may come about.

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JOYCE CAROL OATES

What Is Most American Is Most in Motion

What is most American is most in motion!
Driving all day, luxury of the sky,
CONSTRUCTION AHEAD and RESUME
  NORMAL SPEED and
all pain of memory, because all memory,
behind. And we're in love, in America,
though we must not say so, for such stirs
cruelty like big tarnished spoons in hearts
as American as ours, and as muscled.

No one needs to tell us RESUME NORMAL SPEED
on the interstate splendid as an Ionic column
laid flat amid vertical plunges of telephone poles,
Kansas granaries, parking lots like enormous
dance floors no one has seen as they deserve. And
corporate headquarters flanked by thousands
of fat Canada geese! and these exquisite little ponds
false as mirrors, and as irresistible!

In Bea's Diner in Orion, Kansas, an elderly gentleman
says, "To find a thing beautiful may be just a way
of saying you've found a thing," in slightly different
words but we understand his meaning as RESUME
NORMAL SPEED draws us forward into the next time
zone, and the next. Euclidean propositions
of smokestacks, trashed auto hulks, great American
diesels whose motors never sleep—what is this
place, and who has seen it whole?

CONSTRUCTION AHEAD and we're bearing
  west sporty

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as these yellow bulldozers grinding what's left
and hungry, like us, for more. RESUME NORMAL
SPEED because no pain of memory and no gauge except
the gas tank needle's red and now suddenly what's
this?—a small town with a white church and spire,
a county courthouse with a clock tower backlit
at sunset like an old-fashioned candy box cover,
crimson satin you'd want to run your thumb over,
and over.

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ROBERT SCHULTZ

Snowlight

Snowlight drew him, something new
Having wrapped the usual fuss and clutter
With hushed simplicity. Bushes and rooftops
Billowed and shone. Cars sat hunched
In polished domes while unplowed streets
Tipped right and left. Against this white,
Bare trees threw out their rough, black arms,
Pointing with certainty who knows where.

In the cemetery, his nearest park,
Tombstones held white crests above
Each pair of dates. He walked between them
With eyes that ate the small red berries
On drifted wreaths. He forgot the time
As beauty fed him. But time had stopped
For his close inspection of raspberry
Canes in a small ravine, the dark red
Tubes daubed lightly with blue.

Then he saw the procession,
The long sedan on slickened bricks
Slowly descending. He stood by the narrow
Graveyard road and watched it pass.
He saw a woman through tinted glass,
Her veil pulled back. She held very still
And stared ahead. In front of her
A rusted dump truck, blade attached,
Pushed snow aside. In its box a man
In a red plaid shirt was shovelling hard,
Sowing her road with salt.

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BERT CARDULLO

Black and White, in Color

RICHARD GILMAN ONCE SAID OF THE PLAYWRIGHT Jack Gelber, "He represents the latest manifestation of Yeats's cautionary figure: the man who instead of making poetry out of his quarrel with himself, makes rhetoric out of his quarrel with others." I would say the same of the black filmmaker Spike Lee, whose *Do the Right Thing* certifies him as a rhetorician, not as an artist, and has turned a lot of critics into rhetoricians as well. This is hardly "the most powerful and important American film to come our way in years,"[1] and when someone writes this, he's confusing the subject of *Do the Right Thing*—the uneasy economic cohabitation between blacks and whites in America's big cities—with Spike Lee's treatment of that subject. Lee did good work in his first feature, the comic and sexy *She's Gotta Have It* (1986), but even there he showed a predilection for sententiousness with his opening still shots of Bedford-Stuyvesant in a movie that otherwise brightly satirized the romantic gaming between middle-class black men and women in Brooklyn Heights. I could barely sit through his second film, the bloated and unfunny *School Daze* (1988), for all its purported mockery of fraternity-and-sorority blacks who, at their all-black Southern college, behave as stupidly and insensitively (and study as little) as their white counterparts at predominantly white schools. Now we get *Do the Right Thing*, which returns to the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn (also the scene of Lee's very first film, a documentary), in particular to one block of poor blacks and Hispanics and the two stores that serve them: Sal's Pizzeria and a Korean grocery, on opposite corners.

Lee has a feel for the life of this block, which he chronicles during one long, hot summer Sunday: boisterous youths hanging out on stoops, old and tired women hanging out of windows, middle-aged men hanging back in their street-corner chairs as they dispense street-corner wisdom; children buying snow cones and gleefully "wading" in the water from an opened fire hydrant, old boozers benignly strolling the sidewalk in search of both their next drink and a little love, teenaged couples eating pizza at Sal's, their eyes aglow with sexuality, their hearts filled with hopes not yet dashed. And

[1] I reserve that distinction for any one of the following four films: *Raging Bull* (1979), *Tender Mercies* (1982), *House of Games* (1987), and *Housekeeping* (1988). I'll let the fact that two of these films—*Tender Mercies* and *Housekeeping*—weren't even directed by Americans speak for itself.

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always the music, be it from the neighborhood radio station (WLOV, or "We Love"), from a "ghetto blaster" carried in and out of the film by a character named Radio Raheem, or from the soundtrack itself. But we know from the pre-credit sequence, in which two young black women do dances of sexual-physical assertion (gyration might be a better word) to a "rap" song called "Fight the Power," that Spike Lee is out to do more than record the ebb and flow, the dailiness, of life on a street in Bed-Stuy. The "power" in the film is essentially economic power, on which white merchants like Sal appear to have a lock but which the block-dwellers themselves can exercise through boycott or through vandalism. What one young man, "Buggin' Out," wants from Sal from the start is a few black faces on the pizzeria's "wall of fame," which is lined exclusively with photographs of famous Italian-Americans. Sal has made his living off blacks in this place for twenty-five years, reasons Buggin' Out, so famous blacks deserve representation on the wall; Sal, who is otherwise *not* anti-black, refuses to obey this logic, Buggin' Out tries to organize a boycott but fails, and violence erupts when, together with the menacing Raheem and his blaring ghetto blaster, he attempts to force compliance with his demand. Sal smashes the radio to pieces with a baseball bat, his two sons, Pino and Vito (who work in the store with him), join in the melee that follows, and the police arrive to break things up. Except that Raheem gets killed in the process, Buggin' Out is being beaten as he's carted off in a squad car, and Mookie, Sal's delivery man (shakily played by Lee himself), responds by initiating the looting and burning down of the pizzeria. Throughout this climactic sequence we hear a riotous crowd chanting the names of two previous victims of alleged racial violence in New York—Eleanor Bumpers and Michael Stewart—just as, earlier in the film, we saw graffiti that bore witness to the smoldering resentments of Bed-Stuy residents (e.g., "Tawana [Brawley] Told the Truth," "Bed-Stuy, Do or Die").

If the film's action, as opposed to its texture, seems crammed with incident, it is—so much so that *Do the Right Thing* becomes an over-schematized and finally superficial examination of a question that is itself simplistic: which is the best path toward economic and social justice for blacks, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s advocacy of pacifism and integration, or Malcolm X's of violence and separatism? Indeed, Lee literally frames the question in these terms by including quotations from these two leaders as a postscript, and he literally visualizes this question by having a spastic character named Smiley—ponderously symbolic, in his halting movements and near speechlessness, of the stifling of black America—weave in and out of the film selling copies of what is supposed to be the only known picture of King and Malcolm X together. When, after a number of tries, Smiley finally sells a photograph to Mookie, we know that the question is being directly put to the latter and that ultimately this hard-working yet happy-go-lucky young man will have to "do the right thing." For

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him, it's throwing a trash can through the plate-glass front window of Sal's Pizzeria; for Buggin' Out, it had been trying to lead a boycott of the restaurant.

There's the scheme, and besides being superficial, it's bogus, because what motivates the Bed-Stuy block's inhabitants to destroy the pizzeria (though, curiously, not the Korean grocery—perhaps because, in the end, it's perceived as "minority-owned") has to do, not with the politics of white businesses in black communities, but with police brutality against black males. And even here Lee muddies the issue: Radio Raheem dies in the police chokehold, not because the officer wants to kill him, but because the physically imposing Raheem refuses to be subdued; in effect, he kills himself. Out of dishonesty, arrogance, or the exigencies of commercial moviemaking, Lee neglects to investigate the *manifold* reasons for black economic impotence: a weak family structure, poor education, institutionalized racism, drug infestation, and black-on-black crime, all of which are the inevitable products of blacks' enslaved history. There is not one drug-user or pusher in this movie, in a neighborhood rife with crack houses; there are no crimes—not even petty theft—committed until the assault on Sal's Pizzeria; and the only single-parent family consists of Mookie's Hispanic girlfriend and his little boy, Hector, both of whom Mookie does his best to love and support. Some have called *Do the Right Thing* an allegory or parable; I'd call it a fairy tale.

Lee's rhetoric is exacerbated by his excessive use of oblique-angle shots, which, when used carefully, sparingly, can suggest a world out of kilter, one filled with tension and foreboding. Carol Reed made frequent use of this type of shot in *The Third Man* (1949), but there it didn't call as much attention to itself because it was complemented by Robert Krasker's chiaroscuro lighting, by the inherent stylization of black-and-white film. Here, in living color (defused slightly through the cinematographer Ernest Dickerson's use of yellow filters, which make the air seem hotter and heavier than it is), the oblique angles, and more than enough low angles, fairly beat us over the head, as does Lee's occasional italicization of the action. For instance, during the fight in the pizzeria after Sal's smashing of the ghetto blaster, he cuts to a photograph on the wall of the heavyweight champion Rocky Marciano pummeling a black opponent, just in case we hadn't yet figured out what was going on; and as flames begin to engulf the "wall of fame," the camera finds Smiley sneaking in to place one of his photographs of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X alongside those of the Italian-American celebrities. I didn't review Alan Parker's *Mississippi Burning* (1989) in this column because I thought its fictions were beneath serious consideration. Well, its fictions are matched, from a reverse angle, by those of *Do the Right Thing*: the former film's passive blacks become the latter's hyperactive ones, Parker's two white knights of the F.B.I. become Lee's omnipresent white oppressors, and *Mississippi Burning*'s final, fantasized scene of a group of blacks and

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whites singing together is replaced by *Do the Right Thing*'s final, and equally fantastic, confrontation between Mookie and Sal with the pizzeria in ruins in the background. Like Alan Parker, Spike Lee knows what sells; unlike truly serious filmmakers, neither appreciates the world in its wholeness, complexity, and even sanctity.

If you wish to see a director make poetry out of her quarrel with herself, and on a subject related to Lee's, see Claire Denis's *Chocolat*. Denis grew up in French West Africa, the daughter of a colonial official; shortly after the French Cameroons became the Republic of Cameroon in 1960, amidst the wave of African nationalism sweeping the continent, she moved to France, later attended film school, then worked as an assistant to such directors as Wim Wenders (who co-produced *Chocolat*) and Jim Jarmusch. Denis's subject in her first film is her own childhood, or rather her observations, as a child, of the life around her. Her cinematic style—influenced by her work with Jarmusch, I'd say—is that of the long take and the panning or tracking camera. As much as possible, she keeps reality whole, preferring to move around deliberately within it, to explore with reverence its richness, rather than cut it up for our instant delectation and to fit the shape of her narrative. Denis's style fits the unhurried pace of life in colonial West Africa as well as the vastness and stark beauty of the land, which is as much the subject of her camera as the people who inhabit it. *Chocolat* is a visual poem more than a film plot, with all the indeterminacy of experience remembered and all the ambivalence of truth told.

The film begins in the present, with Denis as an adult (played with quiet eloquence by Mireille Perrier) returning for a visit to North Cameroon. She has in hand the notebook in which her father used to sketch the land he loved so much, and she wants to get to Douala, the seat of the province her father once governed. France—Denis's name in the film—hitches a ride with a black man and his son whom she had watched swimming in the Gulf of Guinea (watching is her near-constant pose, both as an adult and as a child). Only toward the end of the film do we learn that this man is one William J. Park, a black American who has emigrated to Cameroon, adopted an African name, learned the native language of his new country as well as French, and disappeared comfortably into a sea of black faces. Here he cherishes his anonymity, whereas in the mostly white United States he felt that his *black* anonymity had not really been anonymity at all but rather a form of anomie. *Chocolat* begins and ends in the present, with France's ride in Park's car; in between we see her memories of life as a little girl (of about nine years old, played with solemn curiosity by Cécile Ducasse) on a remote government compound, from which her father's duties often take him away and where her regular companion is less her beautiful mother than the black houseman, Protée (French for Proteus)—one of a number of servants to the family of Marc, Aimée, and the young France Dalens. The older

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France's journey home takes place in her mind, not reality, as she sits in the back seat of Park's car and looks out the window. Sweeping traveling shots of the countryside connect her ride in the present with a truck ride in the past (during which she sits in the back with Protée), and they also connect a plane ride in the past (out of Douala, for some petulant Frenchmen who had been stranded there for several weeks by the failure of the same plane's propeller) back with the car in the present, in which the pensive France continues to sit and gaze. William Park takes France, not to Douala, but to the airport, where, as we see a huge jet marked "Cameroon Airlines" being loaded, he tells her, "Leave quickly before they eat you up." The Cameroon that France once knew is no longer there; it now exists only in her mind, and therefore it is in her mind we remain for much of the film. She has retrieved the memories of her girlhood from Cameroon, and she departs with them, just as the nation of France had done nearly thirty years before.

What does France remember? That which she directly participated in, witnessed, or heard report of and now reconstructs: mainly just the events of everyday life on the compound, occasionally ruffled by a dramatic, and telling, incident (which is the way most lives proceed, and why *Chocolat* comes closer to pure realist art than many a tightly plotted, "realistic" film). Protée figures in most of the scenes (and in the title, which is a slang expression from the 1950s meaning "to get caught" as well as a reference to the color of his skin), since he plays three roles—those of boy, butler, and man, of harmless companion for little France, sole servant in the Dalens house itself, and strong protector of the girl and her mother, in addition to overseer of the other servants, in Marc Dalens' absence. (Isaach de Bankolé has a reticent power that poignantly pervades the character, no matter what role he is playing.) The opening scene of the older France's flashback unobtrusively announces two of Protée's functions: we see him sitting beside the young France in the back of the moving truck referred to above, with Marc and Aimée up front in the cab; and next the camera pans the endless, empty landscape to find him side-by-side with Marc, their backs to the truck, urinating at the edge of road. In the course of *Chocolat*, we watch Protée serve the family's meals, tidy up the house, play with France, eat with the other servants, use a rifle of Marc's to guard the Dalens home from hyenas in search of food. We see Aimée at rest and at leisure; as cordial hostess to several visitors and as the loving but somewhat frustrated wife of her husband, who for a good part of the film is out in the wilds, along with his (black) men, protecting his subjects from the lions and panthers that deplete their herds. We follow Aimée and France to a cemetery, where they clean the gravesites of the Germans who controlled this colony until 1916; the final German commandant was murdered by his black manservant, and his legacy is an ominous sign that hangs on the porch of the Dalens residence, which he built: it translates, "This house is

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the last house on earth." From this house the horizon appears to be very far off indeed, Marc explains to his daughter in an intimate scene in her room played against a becalming, sheltered background of green and blue and burgundy.

Denis and her co-scenarist, Jean-Pol Fargeau, use a traditional device to reveal the tensions beneath the placid surface of black-white relations on this government outpost in particular and in the French Cameroons in general: the arrival, by the aforementioned hobbled airplane, of a motley band of outsiders, who behave more or less as they please instead of according to the carefully established rules of colonial occupation. Delpich, a coffee grower, and Luc Segalen, a vagabondish ex-seminarian, stand out, primarily because both men openly consort with blacks at the same time that they appear to be virulent racists. Delpich occupies a room with his servant/mistress Thérèse, to whom he brings food from the Dalens kitchen, and Luc often eats as well as showers in the servants' quarters. The outspoken Luc denounces a black doctor called to the compound as "racially unfit" to practice medicine, yet he accuses Protée of being "worse than the priests who raised [him]" in his servility and passivity. Protée's response to Luc is to overpower him in a fight; Marc's is to tell him that "one day we'll get kicked out of here"; but Aimée's is instead to enjoy Luc's attentions at the same time that she seems to follow Delpich's lustful lead by inviting the princely and handsome Protée's sexual attention. This she does merely by gently taking hold of his leg in an extraordinarily understated yet vividly expressive scene. Aimée sits on the floor in front of some French windows, facing the camera in long shot; Protée comes to close the curtains for the night, and this is when she touches him. He responds by firmly picking her up from the floor, looking straight into her eyes, and leaving the room. Not a word is spoken. And the camera has remained in long shot in order to record the full, elongated drama of the characters' positioning in relation to each other; close-ups and rapid cutting would have suggested intimacy, heat, and celerity, neither of which has any place here.

For his discretion, the loyal and respectful Protée is punished by being transferred to the garage, out of Aimée's sight. There France visits him for the last time, and there she receives the scar on her palm that she still retains as an adult. Protée lets her burn her hand on a pipe that she does not know is hot; then he deliberately burns his own hand, holding it down on the same pipe for an agonizing length of time. Little is said, but much is implied or evoked: about his love-hate for this child of his colonialist exploiters, who in her innocence regards him more as a fellow child than as a man; about his ambivalence toward Aimée and Marc themselves, who conceal their essential racism beneath a veneer of order, formality, and patronage—a veneer that now and then gets cracked by men such as Luc and Delpich, who live their racism for all to see and in so doing have

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paradoxically exorcised it to some degree; and about Protée's love-hatred of himself for retaining his humanity and compassion toward whites in the face of their continuing subjugation of him and his people. The illiterate Protée is not the most self-conscious of characters, still I think it fair to say that these feelings, however inchoately comprehended, run through him. The elder France is the acutely self-conscious one, and of course these feelings—for Protée and his fellow blacks, for her younger self, for her mother and father—possess her in all their baffling complexity. She quarrels with herself about the meaning of the past, she searches out the saving landscape of her memories, and in the end is confronted by this decisive paradox among all the others: that she is not welcome in the land of her birth, whereas William J. Park, who was born an American, has found a home in Cameroon. As France departs Park's car for her plane home, we hear a driving, jaunty, indeed exhilarating African rhythm on the soundtrack (music by Abdullah Ibrahim) that continues over the final shot of the film: three black airport workers out on the tarmac, smoking and bantering in light rain, a cityscape behind them. As the camera tracks in on them from extreme long shot to a full shot of their bodies, we discover that one of the men is played by Isaach de Bankolé, the same actor who portrayed Protée. This worker is not meant to *be* Protée, since the latter would be much older by now; he is meant simply to be a *worker*, unconstrained and at ease, a Protée grown to manhood in a free Cameroon. He and his comrades are the last people we see, not France; and it's their music we hear, not some conventional movie score. They stand out in their yellow raincoats and black faces, even as, during France's flashback, the "chocolat" skins of blacks tended to disappear into frames filled with the browns and yellows of the sun-drenched bush and dominated by the selected whites of French civilization.

Chocolat is a subtle, loving, resonant work by a woman of refined sensibility and embracing vision. Unlike *Do the Right Thing*, this film doesn't push its symbolism, lay on its meaning, or point its finger. It is content to lie back and register, with a paradoxical combination of assent and lament, a changed and changing, if not in fact protean, world. Claire Denis is concerned with plumbing the soothing depths of humanist art, not, like Spike Lee, with skimming the inflammatory surface of racial politics. For all her autobiographical impulse, Denis disappears behind *Chocolat*; for all his social commitment, Lee himself looms up from and finally undoes *Do the Right Thing*, his real subject being his own ego, not the plight of his people.

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Shadows Past and Future

ONE HOT EVENING LAST JULY, a few dozen spectators gathered in the courtyard of a Balinese temple to watch a Kecak performance.[1] They sat in bamboo armchairs placed on risers under a shed. Ornaments made of palm leaves delicately twined with flowers hung down at two-foot intervals from the tin roof. An iron candelabra that looked like a gnarled tree stump stood in the center of the courtyard. Behind it, curving bamboo banners, umbrellas and stone guardian-monsters flanked the temple gateway. As the lamps were lit and a sweet-smelling smoke was drifting from the many small flames, the bare electric bulbs scattered around the shed suddenly went out, and the entire courtyard dissolved into sinister, seductive forest.

Chattering voices rose from the darkness all around, as the monkey chorus, fifty men dressed in black and white checked short sarongs, began to filter in through the temple gate, then fanned out till they surrounded the lamp. Seated on the ground in massed concentric circles of shadowy lamplit faces and dark silhouetted forms, they began their antiphonal chant: heyyya, heyyya, heyyya, heyyya—*chak chak chak!* CHAKchak*CHAK*chak*chak*chak*chak*chak. . . . A priest made his way into the circle and doused them with holy water and incense. Then the story began.

While the monkey chorus clacked and swayed, dancers in brilliant costumes and headdresses took up the story of Prince Rama and his wife Sinta (Sita), whose serial adventures in pursuit of virtue are told in the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. Everyone present knows the story and the characters—the noble prince and his brothers, his noble but less benign rivals, the villain Ravana, and the auxiliary company of beasts, clowns and retainers who share their journey.

During the next hour Rama, an avid hunter, gets lured into the forest by a magic deer, and Sinta, left alone, is kidnapped by Ravana. He carries her off over his shoulder as the monkeys gibber excitedly. Captive in Ravana's court, Sinta resists his advances. As she's drooping in the arms of her attendant, a white shadow suddenly flickers along the temple wall. Someone is creeping toward the monkey circle, and as he jumps into the center we see from his costume and mask that he's Hanuman, the king of the monkeys, who will arrange for

[1] During the summer of 1989 I traveled for two weeks in Indonesia with the much-appreciated assistance of the Festival of Indonesia and the Asian Cultural Council.

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Sinta's rescue. After many battles, tricks and loud monkey cries, Rama and Sinta, reunited and still unstained, seem to rise into the air as the chorus sinks to the ground, and they're carried to safety on the back of the garuda bird.

This performance was part of an all-day ceremony to dedicate the restored village home of I Made Bandem, director of the Academy of Indonesian Dances (ASTI) in Denpasar. The day had begun in the morning with priests chanting over a heap of offerings, a chorus of women singers, Topeng mask dancing, a wayang puppeteer, and two gamelans (orchestras), all holding forth simultaneously while a hundred guests watched and socialized. After the Kecak, performers and audience returned to the party scene for performances of new music and dance composed by members of the ASTI faculty.

By 10:30 P.M. the entire population of the village had arrived by foot or motorbike—babies, teenagers, parents, oldsters—and were squatting in the dirt and perched on the walls around an improvised backyard stage. Now began their favorite event, the drama-gong, a popular theater using many of the same elements as the traditional forms, adapted to satirical contemporary situations.

Two epicene young men with sarongs hitched up under their armpits and made up like exaggerated Topeng princes, discussed their love lives in song and movement that slid from Balinese classical positions into the bumps and shimmies of rock. They seemed to be giving advice to a "refined" young man who spoke in scarcely audible tones and seemed too timid to interrupt their harangue. Meanwhile the heroine, a conceited young woman, complained about *her* love life to a sympathetic friend, or possibly a helpful deity. The acting style was outrageous, the humor dependent largely on prototypes in Balinese classical drama. Our hosts were somewhat disdainful as they bid us good night after an hour, assuring us that the drama-gong would go on for two or three more hours. I wasn't ready to leave. I was fascinated by what looked like a vaudeville version of the *Ramayana*.

The traditional arts in Indonesia pervade all areas of the culture. Especially in Bali, where design, dance and music are inseparable from work, worship and the landscape, everyone lives an "artistic" life that begins with the beautiful little palm-leaf trays woven fresh every day to be placed on household altars with fruit and flower offerings. There isn't much television in Bali yet. Even the electricity and telephones aren't too reliable. But everyday life is full of entertainments and propitiatory acts. Processions, ceremonies, or gamelan practice take place almost daily in every village, and at any time a performance can sprout up in the open-air pavilions, or banjars, that are the local hangout. It's almost embarrassing to write this, because it echoes so closely what the famous Bali hands of the 1930s reported long ago—Walter Spies and Beryl de Zoete, Miguel Covarrubias,

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Vicki Baum, Colin McPhee described the same scene. But these are not rituals mechanically replicated; they're traditions that continue to live for people, in universally appealing and deeply meaningful observance.

In many ways Bali is atypical, possibly even unique, for its resistance to the fragmenting effects of modernity. And it is only one element in the larger puzzle of Indonesian identity. The 13,000 islands that comprise this invented nation sprawl across a vast stretch of the Indian Ocean. The religious and cultural groups that make up Indonesia's population range from the post-Stone Age tribes of Irian Jaya (New Guinea), the hunter-farmer Dayak of Kalimantan (Borneo), the Hindu artisans and rice-farmers of Bali, and the Islamic Sumatrans, to the more secular citizens of urban Java and the savvy workers in tourist industries throughout the archipelago. Indonesia, independent since 1949 after centuries of occupation by the Portuguese, Dutch, English and Japanese, is still feeling its way toward consolidation of these diverse ethnicities into a political whole.

Like other developing nations, Indonesia is also struggling to join the industrialized world, which means modern hotels and air pollution, economic expansion and a paralyzing traffic problem. It means daily agonized choices between the land and the city, between clinging to indigenous culture and talking the world's business lingo. In some countries, notably Japan, this conflict seems to have resolved itself through a well-cultivated dual sensibility: the modernist side of the person makes highly successful television sets while the spiritual side comes home from work and contemplates his private rock garden. But in much of Asia, the debate is messier, the problem more recent, the people less amenable to compartmentalizing their lives.

In Indonesia the impact of technology has been relatively light, and traditional imagery is still a powerful force which spills over into contemporary arts and entertainment. In Jakarta, where twenty-story office and shopping complexes are strung out along smudgy rivers of slow-moving cars, performances of the shadow-puppet play Wayang Kulit are broadcast regularly on the radio. On the eve of the Muslim New Year a mammoth all-night show takes place in an indoor sports arena. The event is so popular that tickets were being energetically scalped throughout the evening. Inside, the mostly male audience of several thousand was ranged behind the large gamelan and the dalang (puppeteer). Virtually no space was allotted in front of the screen, where the shadows flickered for the eyes of only a handful of watchers. Though the traditional painted buffalo-hide puppets were oversize, no one in the audience was close enough to see their finely etched designs or the minute twitches and bows of the characters as they debated philosophical and political issues. The dalang's voice, however, was carried on a loudspeaker, and his jokes were roundly appreciated in the highest galleries.

Another night I went to a Wayang Orang performance. Like

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Wayang Kulit, its plot and characters come from the Hindu epics and its style is based on the court drama Wayang Wong. Wayang Orang repertory runs nightly in a rundown Jakarta theater you might find in New York's East Village. The audience of about 200 reclines in comfortable seats equipped with holders for cans of soda. During the performance workers went up and down the aisles taking orders for food, and a meal was served to the large entourage of the Minister of Culture, who happened to be attending. The language of the play is high Javanese, which not everyone can understand, but here language takes second place to action.

The play began with a chorus of young men led by a pre-adolescent boy, dancing and clowning in unison, almost like the opener of a Broadway show. This scene, according to my host, was nontraditional, but I had already realized that this term doesn't necessarily signify radical new forms in Indonesia. The boys' movements were those of traditional court dance, with its rhythms evened out into a European-sounding 4/4. Unison movement is unusual in Javanese dance-drama, and the frontal-facing lines and diagonals of the choreography were also Western-influenced. When three young women wafted in, they emphasized their undulating hips and neglected the arm and hand gestures that are essential to the decorative court style. Throughout the performance, you could see the classical roots of the acting, but the movements were sketchy, frequently naturalistic rather than stylized. The battles were acrobatic, the clowning almost pantomimic.

Reflexivity—or self-commentary—is a major element of Indonesian theater, and in this, I think, it anticipates Western postmodernism, for satire and up-to-the-minute interjections have always belonged to Wayang and to the Balinese mask drama Topeng. When the familiar clown family appeared in the Wayang Orang, a father and his three sons—one fat, one silent, one skinny and supercilious—they extended their scene into a half-hour dialogue with much-appreciated references and asides to do with the Cultural Minister and government policies. In the acting of the other characters too, there was a gloss on Wayang conventions. For example, when the noble hero arrived to court one of the young girls, he stood to the side waiting to be introduced, adjusting his costume, smoothing back his hair, parodying the narcissistic splendor of his courtly prototype.

Tourism, a major item in the Indonesian economy, has brought about other, not so artful updatings of traditional materials. Tourist performances take place everywhere, and in fact account for the only regular employment many classical artists can get. Decent tourist hotels in Java and Bali have resident gamelans that play during dinner and the cocktail hour. Dance, drama, and puppet performances are also featured at many of the bigger establishments. At the Ambarrukmo Palace Hotel in Yogyakarta, Central Java, the *Ramayana* is given several nights a week in a restaurant set up in an outdoor

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pavilion (pendopo) originally built for court entertainments. Attracted by the sound of the gamelan one night, I wandered into the place and found the story of the abduction of Sinta once again in progress.

Besides the Balinese version embedded in the Kecak, I had also seen this episode the night before in Yogya, at a public performance largely attended by tourists. Javanese *Ramayana*, like Javanese gamelan, is far more stately and even-tempered than the Balinese, with long passages of slow, inconclusive gesture accompanied by a female singer's languorous vocalizing in pentatonic head-tones. But the Abarrukmo's show was greatly condensed. In half an hour it related not only the segments of the tale that had taken an hour the night before, but several others as well. Like an adventure film, the restaurant *Ramayana* stressed all the action parts, omitted long conversations and exposition. Hanuman fought off the enemy giants with a combination of gymnastics and muscularity, and they showed their unfitness by stomping on bandy-legged, like headhunters in a Dorothy Lamour picture. All the movements, especially those of the refined characters, were a bit rounded at the edges, with stage tricks substituted for physical finesse or metaphoric gesture.

Although Hinduism was supplanted in Java by Islam 300 years ago, its icons remain. Outside of Yogya is the temple of Prambanan, partially restored from the ruins left by earthquake, volcanic ash and treasure hunters, with a large new theater in pendopo style just across the plain, where *Ramayana* (the *real Ramayana*, people assured me) is performed every month at the full moon. Around the base of the main temple at Prambanan, the entire *Ramayana* is carved into the stone wall. Dancers today still glide through some of the same positions. And in Yogya's central market, vendors are selling rubber stamps in the shape of Rama, Krishna, and the Wayang clowns.

Much of this traditional culture is still handed down from one artist to his apprentices. At the Sagio puppet workshop outside of Yogya, young men and women bent over their incising tools and hairline paintbrushes in a monk-like silence. Their boss, working alongside them, had learned the craft from his father. The performing arts are even more perishable. One evening we went to the Balinese village of Tista, where two middle-aged teachers were presenting their students in the ancient Legong form of Andir. Everyone in the village crowded into the courtyard, where the dancing, accompanied by a small gamelan, took place on a concrete floor under a palm-woven canopy. The entire space was lit by two fluorescent bulbs. The performers were young girls, aged eight to perhaps sixteen, and one boy of about ten. The teachers, former Legong dancers, either shadowed or mirrored their charges, constantly yanking a recalcitrant arm up into a more extreme position, shoving a head into the proper tilt, pressing with their whole thigh or hip against the smaller one to encourage a

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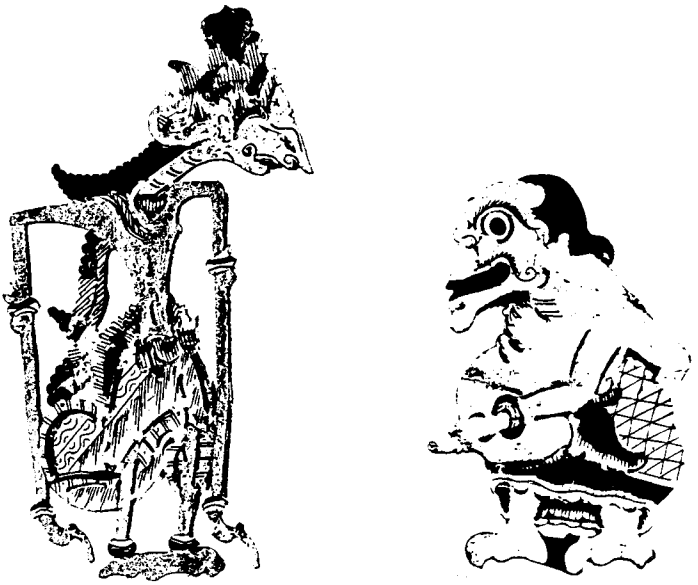

Rama (left) and clown figure: Javanese shadow puppet maquettes in leather from Sagio workshop.

swifter step. Throughout this astonishing display, the children remained composed, following the long, difficult sequence of movement without missing a beat, even while they were being corrected.

Andir is an almost lost form. Our escorts from ASTI had never seen it performed. The reason it hasn't died out is that it must be danced during the annual temple festival to ensure good luck to the village. I never caught its special nuances, even though I'd seen a demonstration of the more common Legong form the same day by nine little girls in another village.

Institutionalization is a less chancy way to provide for the safety of these tenuous traditions, and the government has established several academies to preserve, teach and perform them, such as ASTI in Denpasar and the Indonesian Institute of Arts (ISI) in Yogyakarta. These centers may be criticized for a certain eclecticism and an inevitable blurring of regional distinctions as students from all over learn many styles in standardized versions. The faculty members tend to be well-traveled, and receptive to foreign influences—on the ASTI staff there's an Italian actor whose specialty, commedia dell'arte, filters into his performances in clown parts of Topeng. But the academies provide an important focus for identifying and conferring prestige on the traditional performing arts, and they define an enthusiastic core of professionals who can spread these arts beyond the enclaves where they originate.

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The academies are also a center for innovation, which arises when traditional techniques and structures bump up against each other or are grazed by foreign influences. In Yogyakarta one day I walked into a rehearsal and was astonished to see five or six young women in tights and T-shirts, doing modern dance. It turned out that the choreographer had recently returned from six months of study with Pina Bausch at the Folkwang Schule in Essen, Germany. Later I had many talks with this intense and gifted young man. Although his main work is teaching Javanese dance, he wants his creative work to express his feelings about contemporary life in Indonesia. In trying to escape traditional Indonesian gesture, he had been influenced by Bausch, and yet he was struggling to preserve his own identity. German expressionism couldn't be the way, but where would he find his own models? "I'm going through a transition," he told me. "I want to learn what other choreographers are doing. I want to study in the United States. But it confuses me. I don't know who I am." Though this is a familiar dilemma to Western artists, in the third world, where tradition has been the guide and rationale, such self-examination is a brand-new issue.

Others have tried to create contemporary work by utilizing the many Indonesian styles. I saw a piece by the well-known Javanese choreographer Bagong Kussudiardja, in which brief, visually organized but dissociated phrases from twenty or so genres were set to a musical piece specially arranged to underline their varying dynamics. The group also demonstrated Bagong's classroom warm-up, which looked amazingly like a Martha Graham class and made me wonder whether Bagong had been influenced by Graham, and also how much Graham had borrowed from Bali—or from Ruth St. Denis' idea of Bali.

Bagong's piece, called *Echoes of Nusantara*, struck me as more of a pastiche or a parade than a single idea, and in fact a version of it was chosen to represent the Indonesian people at the opening of the Seoul Olympics in 1986. The dance not only synthesizes many elements of Indonesian dance, it also decontextualizes them and hence makes them safe. Relieved of ritual significance or political/cultural freight, the movements can be just movements, nothing more. Everyone can claim the dance, no one can object to it. It represents all and gives preference to none. However well this may serve the needs of Indonesian nationalism, it barely skims the surface of Indonesian art.

Yet, eclecticism can jiggle the prevailing modes into startling new directions. Perhaps the most centered and the most modern work I encountered in Indonesia was a new-music piece by the ASTI composer Nyoman Windha. It combined the damped, bi-tonal properties of Javanese metallophones with the more strident Balinese gongs; the interlocking rhythmic and melodic techniques of Bali with the almost Arabic vocalise of Java. And jazzlike syncopation, and

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weird dislocations like having the male instrumentalists sing in falsetto to double the female singer's line.

A few days later, at ISI in Yogyakarta, I watched a rehearsal of a new dance that looked like much of the court dance I'd seen in Java but was based on a Muslim story rather than a traditional Hindu text. With its religious inspiration and conventionalized dramatic expression, Indonesian performance is often based on narrative. Many contemporary choreographers use either ritual themes or ancient stories that they restructure in nontraditional ways.

The Gumarang Sakti company from Sumatra, led by the choreographer Gusmiati Suid, even does what we would call abstract or plotless dance. The movement is based on martial arts, set in floor patterns clearly readable to the Western eye. The men and women frequently do the same movements, and all of them have an appetite for space. This sleek, modern work nevertheless has a pervasive spirituality, emanating not only from the suggestions of role-playing and the Muslim ritual elements in the music, but from a strong sense of ensemble among the dancers. Cued by vocalizations from within the group, they maintain a propulsive ongoing rhythm and a cohesiveness that most Western dancers would have to simulate.

Indonesian contemporary dance and music reflect the problems of appropriation and fusion experienced by all regional cultures coming to grips with internationalism. Where do you abandon some kind of organic inspiration and start merely putting things together? How much can you distort or deconstruct the traditional forms and formulas before you dissipate their force? How to balance the new impetus of the individual creative artist with the older, slower integrity of an art that develops from group needs? I think most observers of intercultural performance now agree that traditional art cannot remain static. Performance is not a museum, even when it strives to preserve the past. I'm convinced that the most interesting thing to look at in the arts will be how traditional forms evolve, recombine, and renew themselves in the nineties and beyond.

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RICHARD HORNBY

The London Theatre

THE BRITISH THEATRE IS FLOUNDERING after a decade of Thatcherism. The Prime Minister's economic policies now manage to combine high interest rates, high unemployment, high inflation, and drastic cuts in social services and the arts. In 1987, the Conservative minister for the arts, Richard Luce, outlined a brave new program in which the arts would be required to obtain a greater portion of their revenues from non-government sources. Luce cited the example of the United States, where corporate giving was much higher than in Britain. Anybody who would use America as an example for promoting the arts must have his head in cloudland, but such narrow ideology is typical of Thatcher and her ministers, who wouldn't be caught dead in a museum, concert hall, or theatre, but who know how to read the bottom line.

One result of the new policy has been appalling increases in theatre ticket prices. Over the past few decades, tickets in London have cost about half what they do in New York, despite floating exchange rates and differing levels of inflation, but now they are at three quarters and creeping upwards, which is certainly not the result of New York prices being held down. Cutbacks have had other negative effects: the upstairs theatre at the Royal Court, site of much important experimentation, has had to close, while the Royal Shakespeare Company no longer runs the Mermaid Theatre, where it had been performing rarely produced but fascinating plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries. And at the Barbican Theatre, the main London performing space of the RSC, the depths of vulgarity have been achieved with a new Corporate Members' Private Bar, where members of the corporate elite can toast the "privatization" of a theatre that is supposed to belong to all the people.

The need to please corporate sponsors has caused a growing conservatism in plays that are produced. One story, probably true, is that a sponsor dropped John Ford's Jacobean tragedy *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* because the title did not fit its corporate image! More insidious is the growing number of American plays that are done, particularly in summer, to attract U.S. tourists, and to reduce risk generally by sticking to what has already proven commercially successful. I have noticed this trend in the past, but this year the Americanization of the London stage was staggering. Running simultaneously in July were Kaufman and Hart's *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, Terrence McNally's *Frankie and Johnny*, Robert Harling's *Steel Magnolias*, David Mamet's

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Speed the Plow, Cole Porter's *Anything Goes*, David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*, Lerner and Loewe's *Brigadoon*, and an adaptation of Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Since most of these are actor pieces of no literary distinction, their success depended on the quality of the performances by the all-British casts, who ranged from adequate to inept. None of the six actresses in *Steel Magnolias* could do a remotely convincing Southern accent, for example, nor had any feel for the Louisiana milieu with its intricate personal relationships; the production was far inferior to the delightful version still running in Greenwich Village.

One bright aspect about the American craze is the inclusion of original works. It is still cheaper to put on a play in London than in New York, making it something of a tryout town, as Boston and Philadelphia used to be. Ken Ludwig's skillful farce, *Lend Me a Tenor*, which had a good run on Broadway in the spring and summer, had its initial production on the West End, for example. This year the Royal Shakespeare Company performed a new play by American playwright Richard Nelson called *Some Americans Abroad*, a literate but not particularly deft satire of American academics in England. I really didn't mind seeing myself lampooned—the professors perform a lot of ingenuous activities I've actually done, like reciting Wordsworth's Westminster Bridge sonnet on the bridge itself—but I did find the heaviness of the piece wearing. Aside from a gee-whiz enthusiasm for English literature and theatre, the characters have no redeeming features whatsoever, appearing in scene after scene as callow, venal, mendacious, lecherous, cowardly, and stupid. At the same time, the two fragile threads of plot, in which one of the professors is desperately trying to get his contract renewed, and another is accused of molesting a student, are neither developed nor resolved. As a result, although the production drew a lot of cheap laughs, it was hard afterwards even to remember what happened in it. According to my notes, however, it was well acted, with impeccable American accents from all but one of its large British cast, though somehow their voice coach did not know that Amherst has a silent *H*.

Some Americans Abroad probably will not come to the U.S., but Martin Sherman's *A Madhouse in Goa* may well make the trip. Sherman is an American playwright best known for *Bent*, a study of the persecution of homosexuals in Nazi Germany, which shifts from the apartment of a sophisticated homosexual in Berlin to a prison camp where he is interned. *Madhouse* employs an even more striking shift: the first act depicts a romantic sexual encounter on a Greek island in 1966; the second act takes place in the early 1990s on another Greek island, where a principal character is the *author* of the first act, which is based on an incident in his life but which is not a literal description of it. The Pirandellian interplay between drama and reality is potentially fascinating. Unfortunately, both acts are talky and slow, and an abrupt, apocalyptic ending seems to have been tacked on because

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Sherman realized it was about time for the play to stop. In about five minutes, we hear about the deaths of most of the characters, from cancer, an airplane explosion, a violent murder; another character is diagnosed as having AIDS, which has become almost obligatory for any play these days with contemporary characters; then the island itself blows up, in a volcanic eruption. A sophomore in a playwriting class would have a hard time getting away with such heavy-handedness, which is presented here without a trace of irony. If the play makes it to New York, I hope that Sherman can first revise and tighten it. There is a good play here somewhere, if he can find it.

The most conspicuous example of the Americanization of the English stage was the production of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, starring Dustin Hoffman, with a supporting cast made up of British actors recently formed into a commercial company by Sir Peter Hall. The United States may be the only country in the world (and I don't just mean the English-speaking world) in which a major actor could reach fifty years of age without ever having performed Shakespeare. Nevertheless, Hoffman is a great character actor, who is potentially a stunning Shylock. The London critics belittled his inept performance, but the underlying problem was the same as with Joseph Papp's Shakespeare Marathon at the New York Public Shakespeare Festival: when movie stars, no matter how inexperienced with classical stage acting, are patiently and carefully directed by someone with a deep understanding of Shakespeare (like Stuart Vaughan, who directed a solid *Julius Caesar* with Al Pacino and Martin Sheen), the results can be splendid. After all, they are not stars for nothing, and if they typically lack sufficient voices, then can nonetheless bring magnetism and emotional depth to their roles. But when a slapdash director with no knowledge of Shakespeare is in charge (like Harold Guskin, who guided a talented group of young stars to an abysmal *Twelfth Night* in Central Park last June), the actors, lacking experience and training, have no inner resources to fall back on. A good British cast will sometimes overcome inept direction in Shakespeare; an American cast, no matter how good, will not.

There is no question that Peter Hall understands Shakespeare; he is one of the best Shakespearean directors in the world. But his directing is variable. His productions are always lively, and make strong visual statements, but he is not always good at text analysis, and, like many good British directors, he is not much of an actor coach. (Anyone used to directing at the National Theatre or the Royal Shakespeare Company assumes, with good reason, that the actors don't need coaching.) Moreover, he spreads himself thin, directing many operas and plays per year plus doing vast amounts of administrative work. Thus, when his first inspiration is off base, it is unlikely to be corrected, and this *Merchant*, concocted with the foreknowledge that it would be an automatic box office hit (it is scheduled to be

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running in New York when this review appears), was ill-conceived and ill-executed.

The set, for instance, had a prettified design with Italian Renaissance arches and columns that was all wrong. Shakespeare's Venice is no honeymoon dream world, like the actual Venice of today, but a harsh commercial town of deals, ventures, debts, and scarcity. We never hear of gondolas, canals, or St. Mark's Square (as we do, for example, in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, written soon after), but only of the Rialto, the commercial center. We see only men there (except for Jessica, who escapes), who are typically spiteful or troubled. Portia's world of Belmont ("beautiful mountain"), by contrast, has only women living in it (her father is dead); it is exotic, romantic, and unbelievably wealthy. When Portia hears of Antonio's debt to Shylock, she offers to pay it twelve times over, and then ups it to twenty times! Chris Dyer's set designs, however, made no contrast between the two worlds whatsoever, so that audience members unfamiliar with the play had trouble even figuring out where scenes were taking place, much less having the proper emotional response to them.

Furthermore, the blocking was overly busy, with meaningless positionings and groupings. Portia, for example, dashed around in the trial scene like a dervish, finally even grabbing Shylock's upraised arm brandishing the knife on "Tarry a little; there is something else. This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood." She is supposed to be the eye of the storm, the voice of reason and moderation, who works out everything for the best *by law* rather than by force. The understated "Tarry a little" should be delivered in a still, small voice, which nonetheless stops Shylock, who is the busy one in the scene, in his tracks.

Shylock was continually blocked surrounded by other actors, when he should instead be set apart from them, as an alien presence. This was done to make him seem beleaguered by Christians, to enhance sympathy for him. In Shakespeare's day the role of Shylock was played as a comic villain, but it has been performed sympathetically ever since Edmund Kean dazzled London by playing it that way in the early nineteenth century. In fact, like Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* or Jaques in *As You Like It*, Shylock is a mixture of comic and tragic; the challenge is to play both. Hoffman's version, however, became a B'nai B'rith anti-defamation homily. He seemed mild-mannered, sensitive, and agreeable, even managing to toss off lines like "I hate him for he is a Christian" casually, as if explaining a distaste for artichokes. The Christians in the play, on the other hand, screamed at him unceasingly, and literally spat on him numerous times. Even Antonio's line in the trial scene, "I am a tainted wether of the flock," which is supposed to express Christian resignation, ended up being snarled at Shylock. I almost expected Leigh Lawson, playing the role, to add "You bastard!"

But if the production glossed over the anti-Semitic elements in the

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play or turned them into their opposite, it showed no such reluctance in making fun of the blind. Old Gobbo, Lancelot Gobbo's "high-gravel blind" father, played by John Cater, wandered around bumping into columns, tripping over a bench, and nearly falling into the orchestra. This, however, is fully supported by the text, where Old Gobbo is ruthlessly mocked, so that the scenes played wonderfully well, drawing solid laughter and applause. If Hall had shown the same respect for text in his treatment of Shylock, the production as a whole might have worked too. Directors of Shakespeare need to remember that these are four hundred-year-old plays full of attitudes that are inevitably different from ours today; to try to turn them into contemporary statements only diminishes them. Surely audiences can be trusted to have some perspective on what is being performed, rather than automatically relating it to their personal experience. Since I am Jewish (at least by ancestry), and had a father who was blind in his old age, I ought by the conventional wisdom to have been delighted by Hoffman's performance, and offended by Cater's, but in fact it was the other way around, since the former was false to the play and the latter true to it.

Peter Hall's departure from the National Theatre to form his own company left Richard Eyre as Director, who presided over a wildly uneven summer season. Eyre directed a heavy, slow production of Granville Barker's *The Voysey Inheritance* (not nearly as good as the one at the Canadian Shaw Festival last year), and an appalling *Hamlet*, with a tense, hollow performance from Daniel Day-Lewis in the title role. The set, by John Gunter, was an overblown monstrosity, dominated by a huge statue of Hamlet's father up center, which got in the way of everything staged behind it. The only redeeming features of this weary, stale, flat production were the performances of Judi Dench as Gertrude and Michael Bryant as Polonius—never before was I so sorry to see him killed! Bryant, as usual, brought something new to his role, making the character foolish but authoritative, a powerful Lord Chamberlain who really seemed as though he ran the place.

Other weak productions at National included a *Hedda Gabler* on another oversized set. Tesman's stuffy residence became a two-story "villa" (to quote the program) that looked like the interior of a Malibu beach house. Juliet Stevenson, an excellent actress who should have shot her director, Howard Davies, with General Gabler's pistol, was forced into ridiculous actions, like a mad dash up two dozen steps and across a balcony while shouting a line of only three words. There was also a production of Joshua Sobol's *Ghetto*, about a theatre company in the Vilna ghetto under the Nazis, full of all the stereotypical characters long familiar to us from hundreds of plays, films, TV miniseries, and novels—a sadistic Nazi, ragged families, black marketeers, intellectuals, collaborators, etc. Directed by Nicholas Hytner, it was actually well done, but told us nothing new about the Holocaust.

Despite all this dross, National did manage some admirable pro-

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ductions, including a *Misanthrope* with a fine performance by Edward Petherbridge in the title role (though he was hindered by Tony Harrison's mannered translation), and a remarkable *Fuente Ovejuna*, Lope de Vega's 1619 Spanish play about a peasant revolt, which had beautiful period costumes, and glowing amber lighting, giving us crowds of luminous peasant faces reminiscent of some of Goya's paintings. Declan Donnellan, a new director at National, knows how to use stillness and silence with great effect; he also got consistently high performances from the large cast, who were remarkably absorbed in their roles though performing only a few feet from the audience in the small Cottesloe Theatre. Adrian Mitchell's translation, slangy and vigorous yet elevated and strange, added to the enjoyment.

Another success at National was David Storey's *The March on Russia*. Storey is one of several British playwrights, including Harold Pinter and Simon Gray, who operate in the Chekhovian tradition of a flat, naturalistic style that nonetheless transmits emotional richness. By indirections, they find direction out. Chekhov did it by burying the action, placing it offstage and unremarked upon; Pinter goes further, creating an atmosphere of menace that percolates more ominously as more things are left unsaid. With Storey, however, events are shown and emotions expressed, but they dissolve into lyricism. *Russia* concerns the family reunion for the sixtieth anniversary of an old coal miner and his wife living in the English midlands in the 1970s. A pivotal event in the second act occurs when the miner gives his wife a ring as an anniversary present. Expensive gifts are not usual in this family; money is tight; she fears he might even have stolen it, since he has been caught absent-mindedly putting things in his pocket in a shop. "This ring is used," she says scornfully. "An antique," he says, insisting he paid good money for it. There are tears, recriminations, reconciliations, yet the tone is understated and elegiac. Remarks constantly call up their years together. We get a sense of a wonderfully *connected* family, to one another, to the past (the title of the play refers to the old man's involvement in the British invasion that attempted to put down the Russian Revolution in 1919), to their country. There are few happy marriages in literature, because it is hard to make them dramatic, but Storey, aided by Lindsay Anderson's direction and the masterful performances of Bill Owen and Constance Chapman as the elderly couple, succeeded in doing it.

The work of the Royal Shakespeare Company seemed more consistent than that of National. In addition to *Some Americans Abroad* and *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, I saw good productions of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Sir George Etherege's *The Man of Mode*, all four of which were well acted. *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, directed by the American Gene Saks, was lively and inventive, with flawless accents. John Wood in the title role had impressive energy and timing, and a strong, resonant voice. He needed to find more

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vocal variety, however; as a result of his playing the entire performance at top volume, he had little voice left when I saw him in *Tempest* the next night. His Prospero thus became plaintive rather than authoritative, a problem aggravated by David Fielding's poor costuming. Prospero wore a modern shirt, open at the collar, and an old baggy pair of wool trousers, making him look like a mechanic on his holiday at Brighton. Fielding's set, however, a steeply raked bare platform backed by a huge cyclorama, subtly lit by Mark Henderson, succeeded in evoking the strange, fluid world of Prospero's magic island.

Garry Hynes's production of *Man of Mode* was an example of how Restoration comedy should be done, but seldom is. Spare but elegant, in the small Barbican theatre called The Pit, the emphasis was on clear, dynamic acting, supported by excellent costumes (for some reason, no designer was listed—perhaps they were recycled from another production). The opening scene between Dorimant and his friend Medley set the tone. Dorimant was dressing in a dainty, lacy costume, putting on makeup, even kissing his friend, yet the tone was entirely masculine. They could have been football players in a locker room. It was a reminder that there was a time when preening was part of masculinity rather than its opposite. This sure sense of period, which never degenerated into archaism for its own sake, continued throughout. Miles Anderson, a fine, strong young actor, was an outstanding Dorimant; he also played Macbeth in a recycled version of the play that I reviewed in *The Hudson Review* two years ago. (The revival may again have been to save money.) Anderson was a better Macbeth than Jonathan Pryce—anybody would be—but I don't envy his having to play in a production where everything is subordinated to the bright idea of having the set shrink at the end.

In addition to all the Americana on the West End, there were a typical collection of commercial plays: an awkwardly written Victorian period piece by Royce Ryton called *The Royal Baccarat Scandal*, about a gambling incident involving Edward VII when he was Prince of Wales; Peter Shaffer's talky, unfunny comedy, *Lettice and Lovage*, worthwhile only for Alan Tagg's architecturally interesting sets; an inept thriller-spoof, *Over My Dead Body*, by Michael Sutton and Anthony Fingleton. There was also a respectable commercial production of *Much Ado About Nothing* with the veteran actors Felicity Kendal and Alan Bates as Beatrice and Benedick, who gave well-crafted individual performances, but who seemed to have little electricity passing between them. I saw it on the hottest night of one of the hottest summers in recent decades, however, in a theatre that was not air-conditioned, which perhaps frazzled them as much as it did the audience.

Alan Ayckbourn's new play, *Henceforward . . .*, was disappointing. Set in the future, it concerns a composer of electronic music estranged from his family, who lives with a robot programmed to behave like a

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woman. There is one funny scene, reminiscent of Shaw's *Pygmalion*, in which the hero passes off the unpredictable robot as his girlfriend, but otherwise the play is overly frenetic yet cloyingly sentimental. The brave new world setting is all wrong for Ayckbourn, who usually writes about ordinary people in mundane situations, with nonetheless hilarious results.

The best play on the West End was Alan Bennett's *Single Spies*, which had transferred from National. This is actually two plays, the first of which, *An Englishman Abroad*, was shown on U.S. television a few years ago. It is the true story of actress Coral Browne's meeting with the spy Guy Burgess in Moscow in 1958; it plays well, but is little more than a character study. The second play, *A Question of Attribution*, goes deeper. Set in the late 1960s, it concerns another spy, Anthony Blunt (superbly played by Bennett himself), when he was Director of the Courtauld Institute and actually in charge of the Queen's own art collection. He has secretly confessed, and is being interrogated by Scotland Yard about his contacts; there is also a scene with the Queen, wickedly parodied by Prunella Scales, which gave the play a bit of notoriety and no doubt added to its commercial success. Bennett makes the Queen marvelously ambiguous; one never knows whether she is being naively comic or making shrewd double-entendres. "Portraits are supposed to be frightfully self-revealing," she says, chatting with Blunt. "Show what one's really like. The secret self. Either that, or the eyes are supposed to follow you round the room. I don't know that one has a secret self. Though it's generally assumed that one has." We of course know that Blunt does have a secret self, but whether this is just blather or sly probing is a mystery. The play is full of such intricacies, which explore the nature of art and reality, and how we perceive them. *A Question of Attribution* is the perfect play for its time, in a country struggling to redefine the nature of government and of art, and the relationship between them.

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ROBERT S. CLARK

Music Chronicle

THESE DAYS, WHEN OUR CULTURAL SPONSORS never take extended holidays, an East Coast summer can provide the opportunity to amble up musical byways that had to be forsworn in the regular season. Because the tempo is slower, and the monuments are in storage until fall, summer can also be a good time to catch up with previously neglected mainstream trends. I did a little of both last summer, with results that were predictably mixed but never less than diverting.

Early in July, Carnegie Hall came up with one of the season's most creditable ideas: a series of three re-creations of pivotal jazz events that took place at the hall. Chronologically, they were the May 2, 1912, "Concert of Negro Music" by James Reese Europe and his Clef Club Orchestra; the April 10, 1927, concert at which the maverick composer George Antheil premiered his *Ballet mécanique* and *Jazz Symphony*; and finally the January 23, 1943, premiere of Duke Ellington's extended piece for jazz band, *Black, Brown and Beige*, which he called "A Tone Parallel to the History of the Negro in America." Lamentably, I was able to be present for only one of these evenings, the first, which—because they were done in reverse chronological order—was the Ellington concert.

It could be argued that calling these performances re-creations of jazz events was misrepresentation. James Reese Europe's band, made up of mandolins, banjos, guitars, bandolas and strings as well as brass, reeds and percussion, played a repertoire that stretched from vaudeville tunes, marches and ragtime to waltzes and ballroom dances (at one period it regularly accompanied the dancers Vernon and Irene Castle). In 1912 jazz, by anyone's definition, was embryonic. Today's reigning authority, Gunther Schuller, refers to Europe as "the most important transitional figure in the pre-history of jazz on the East Coast" and calls him a "catalyst" of the orchestral jazz typified a decade and more later by Ellington, Fletcher Henderson and Paul Whiteman.

Similarly, Antheil's works embody a weird mix of the syncopation and inflection of jazz, the disjointed spirit of Dada, and a lot of need to *épater le bourgeoisie*: the *Ballet* calls for ten pianists, 12 percussionists on xylophones, electric bells and airplane propellers, and a mechanical player piano. The *Jazz Symphony*, which Antheil had hoped would be played for the first time by Whiteman's band, was actually performed at the premiere by the blues master W. C. Handy and his orchestra.

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And for some *Black, Brown and Beige* is equally a hybrid—notably, at its premiere, the iconoclast record producer John Hammond, who said Ellington had "deserted jazz." This is a theme echoed by Ellington's most recent biographer, James Lincoln Collier, who strives to persuade us that the longer, more eclectic and more self-consciously "artistic" of Ellington's compositions were a betrayal of his heritage and an abandonment of his natural voice.

Experiencing *Black, Brown and Beige* complete in concert confirms what many who have heard the private recording of the 1943 concert (only excerpts were commercially recorded) have asserted: that it is a much stronger work than its reception by critics and audiences back then would lead one to believe. "Black," the first section, reaches from 1620 to the eighteenth-century beginnings of slavery on the American continent, and encompasses the two most celebrated segments of the work, the lively "Work Song" and the quasi-spiritual "Come Sunday." "Brown" traces "the emergence of Negro heroes" from the Revolutionary War through emancipation and the First World War, and marks black music's incorporation of Caribbean influence and the beginnings of the blues. "Beige" fills in the final decades, moving from twenties big-band jazz to a ballad intended to evoke Sugar Hill in the Harlem of the time. For this performance, Ellington's recorded voice was heard commenting on the role of blacks in the Second World War: "So, just as always before, the Black, Brown and Beige were soon right in there with the Red, White and Blue."

Undeniably the "Black" movement outclasses the others, with its compelling thematic material ("Come Sunday" became a popular vehicle for the great alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges) and its strong if rudimentary sense of unity. And intermittently throughout, one senses the haste with which Ellington is said to have put the piece together. But every section has its ample rewards, and a coda written by Ellington in 1969 brings the whole to a satisfying close. As the music retreats into history, the cavils of Hammond and those who take his line age less gracefully than the score. The crack team assembled for the Carnegie re-creation by conductor Maurice Peress, sometimes more accomplished and dutiful than idiomatic, nonetheless gave a rousing and often moving account of it, and solo work by trumpeter John Faddis, trombonists Dave Bargeron and Art Baron, and vocalist Melodee Savage was outstanding.

Black, Brown and Beige was surrounded on this occasion, as it was on the first night, by much other music by Ellington and his collaborators. Among the best pieces were "Black and Tan Fantasy," "Rockin' in Rhythm" and "Koko," as well as several of the "concertos" Ellington wrote for his sidemen between 1938 and 1942. The veteran Jimmy Hamilton did a fine turn on "Are You Stickin'?"; Sir Roland Hanna tossed off a nice "Blue Belles of Harlem"; and alto saxophonist Frank Wess was superb in the Ellington-Strayhorn "Day Dream." The evening—better than three hours long—concluded with a well-known

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trio of hits: "Don't Get Around Much Anymore," "Goin' Up" and "Mood Indigo."

An essay on cultural pathology could be written about the name Lincoln Center has bestowed on one of its summer offerings: "Serious Fun!" A three-season-old series, it is described in the program booklet as having come together after Lincoln Center President Nathan Leventhal "decided that the institution should reflect activity in the contemporary performing arts along with classical events such as its Mostly Mozart festival." Further on, Serious Fun! (don't omit the exclamation point—it is part of the name) impresario Jed Wheeler enthuses, "What is incredible to me is just how much new work with so much integrity and commitment is out there. This work deserves a bigger audience."

But why plaster "integrity and commitment" with a condescending label like Serious Fun!? To whose tastes is such a moniker truckling? For those who, in Orwell's words, "flock to the smell of progress like bluebottles to a dead horse," it is likely to smack of an elitist put-down. On the other hand, if it is meant to imply that Lincoln Center's customary fare is serious but not fun, surely it only exasperates those who can work up a grin during a Beethoven scherzo—not a good start at claiming reluctant attention. And for those artists who appear in the series and have mastered the (sometimes arcane) disciplines necessary to mount a finished work of art, isn't it patronizing to them to have that exclamation point tacked onto their efforts?

I spent two evenings immersed in the murky flow of Serious Fun!'s cultural tributaries. On the first, the subject—AIDS—was serious but the performance wasn't much fun. Dubbed both "Plague Mass" and "Masque of the Red Death" in the program, it is the work of Diamanda Galas, both composer and performer for the one-woman show. Its central texts are Old Testament excerpts on the themes of affliction, rejection and transgression, supplemented by Galas' own words, a version of the spiritual "Let My People Go," and a poem by Gerard de Nerval.

Alone on a dark stage with only a piano and a microphone, swathed in white vapors that billowed ominously at excited moments, Galas delivered her nonstop exhortations and lamentations partly in a sung parody of operatic coloratura and partly in imitation of an evangelical preacher's chant and rant. Prerecorded vocal and instrumental accompaniment (most of it credited to Galas) alternated with digitally delayed and altered repetitions of her live performance. Presumably the evening's message was the conclusion of the Nerval poem: in the program's translation, "If you are a man (and not a coward) you will grasp the hand of him denied by mercy until his breath becomes your own."

I say "presumably" because Galas' top-of-the-voice delivery into the microphone, combined with the overlapping tape sounds, rendered

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only about one word in ten intelligible to this listener. (It may have been otherwise for much of the audience, who looked of an age to have been weaned on heavy-metal rock.) It helped that the program booklet contained generous portions of the biblical texts. But even these could not resolve the obscurity of a great deal that reached me. Was, for instance, Galas' use of the fruity accent and cadences of a Jimmy Swaggart for the Old Testament passages a swipe at a sector of American society that is notoriously hostile to victims of AIDS? Or was the biblical fire and brimstone meant to convey the trendy notion that the virus is a visitation on a wicked world by an angry Almighty? Galas' impenetrable performance offered no clue.

But by the evening's third or fourth quarter-hour a painful awareness of the piece's almost total theatrical poverty had settled over this listener like a pall. The most outrageous corners of the avant-garde can occasionally make something fresh and zany out of slender, secondhand and parodied or banal materials. If this work was a fair sample, Galas cannot. For all the apparent enthusiasm with which her offerings have been greeted from Western Europe and Yugoslavia to Australia and San Diego, Galas is as ersatz an article as the cultural left harbors. You may be, as I am, tired of special pleading on behalf of AIDS victims, but they deserve better spokesmen than this.

The second evening proved more substantial. Under the rubric "Mélange à Trois," it consisted of the world premiere of Lucia Hwong's theater piece *Venus Voodoo*, Scott Johnson's string quartet "Bird in the Domes" and two movements from an uncompleted work for mixed ensemble, and excerpts from Anthony Davis' opera *Under the Double Moon*, given its premiere in St. Louis in June.

Ms. Hwong's theater piece, like Ms. Galas', is topical: its eight movements for musicians and dancers deal with the molestation of a young girl and her eventual revenge on the male gender. Hwong's epigraph for her work could come straight out of the latest progressive sociology textbook: "In an aggression-dominated world which does not allow a complementary balance of power between male and female, the struggle for ultimate power and the need to dominate leads [*sic*] to psychic damage to both sexes."

It was fortunate that Hwong's music occasionally transcended its intentions. Her own playing of the pipa, a Chinese lute-like instrument, was framed in an ensemble of synthesizers, percussion and strings. Much of the music was cut from the familiar cloth of current minimalist styles—broadly ranging arpeggiated ostinatos, simple and static harmonies, melodies and rhythms derived from popular sources—but laced with piquant Oriental touches. Near the end, Miss Hwong lay down her pipa to dance the role of the wronged and vengeful female, finally destroying a cardboard facsimile of her male partner.

By comparison, Johnson's music was closer to concert standards,

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and both well-crafted and redolent of talent. The string quartet, commissioned in 1986 for the Kronos Quartet and very well played on this occasion by violinists by Mary Rowell and Senovia Cummins, violist Paul Cortese and cellist Erik Friedlander, seemed at times like a sampler of the Kronos' concert repertoire. Amid broad stretches that smacked of Debussy and Bartók one could discern the influence of popular music. Johnson's electric guitar joined two of the string players and Philip Bush on synthesizer in an *Andante* and *Scherzoid* from a work in progress commissioned by Serious Fun! Especially noteworthy was the opening movement, which unfolded contrapuntally with impressive effect. The fleet second movement had a French flair.

I had come to hear the Anthony Davis pieces, drawn by what I had heard about his opera on the life of Malcolm X. His segment of the program opened with a movement from *Wayang II*, for a group of acoustical instruments, presumably players who are part of his permanent ensemble Episteme. It was from this piece, Davis explained from the stage, that his science fiction opera derives. The excerpts that followed combined the influences heard in *Wayang II*: jazz and rock, the gamelan orchestra, Leonard Bernstein and Philip Glass. Tenor Thomas Young made a strong impression in "The Inspector's Aria," and a duet sung by mezzo-soprano Hilda Harris and baritone Eugene Perry was haunting. Yet here, and in the three works that rounded out the program, what came through to this observer was less a striking voice than a marked dexterity at integrating American styles of the present and recent past. The booklet contained a long summary of *Under the Double Moon*, which mixes up myth-like elements, amphibious creatures, telepathic powers, utopianism and Zen-like meditation. It did not arouse much curiosity.

Some pleasures can be counted on. Lincoln Center's venerable "Mostly Mozart," launched more than twenty years ago to ease the balance-sheet burden of an empty Avery Fisher Hall during the summer lull, has grown bureaucratic and routine, but when it brings together the likes of conductor Gerard Schwarz (its current music director), pianist Alicia de Larrocha (a Festival regular), and soprano Roberta Alexander, it is a good gamble. Sure enough, de Larrocha, Schwarz and the small orchestra brought command and grace to Beethoven's First Piano Concerto. De Larrocha's playing is always unmannered, sparing of inflection and regular but never metronomic, and the orchestra's clipped sound, short on vibrato, was a good match. Predictably it was the romping finale that came off best: de Larrocha relished the opportunity to bring down the house.

After intermission Miss Alexander sang "*Al desio di chi t'adora*" (K. 577), the alternate and flashier aria for Susanna in the final act of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, replacing "*Deh vieni, non tardar*" (what a shock to hear the well-known recitative lead into the unknown), and

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"*Non più di fiori*" from *Clemenza di Tito* (K. 621), with Paul Gallo providing a fine basset horn obbligato for the latter. The engaging Miss Alexander may lack the ultimate polish, but more than makes up for it in secure and forward tone, sinuous phrasing and a palpable and rare radiance of sound.

The de Larrocha-Schwarz team showed that the dulling film of overfamiliarity can be wiped away by the application of sheer musical intelligence. Two others of the summer's concerts applied a different tonic: timeworn music freshened by being played on instruments of the composer's time. At Avery Fisher (also in "Mostly Mozart"), Trevor Pinnock led an original instruments ensemble in Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and *Gloria*. In the first, the massed strings sweetly cushioned the solo violin of Simon Standage, whose playing was supremely skilled and shapely. In the choral work the reduced volume of the instruments neatly supported the suave vocal soloists, but the chorus sometimes sang with an inappropriately aggressive tone.

Even more stimulating was the Tanglewood concert at which Roger Norrington led the London Classical Players in Beethoven's Sixth ("Pastoral") and Eighth Symphonies and the *Creatures of Prometheus* overture. The ensemble, numbering about forty, played on instruments of the early nineteenth century or replicas of them, and at a concert pitch about a quarter-tone lower than our day's. The results were revelatory in their clarity. String lines were superbly crisp and unforced, and the soft-grained brass tone, even when sustained, never blanketed the strings. Percussion and wind attacks never smeared over succeeding notes. Norrington took one or two movements at a reckless clip, and yet their musical utterance was lucid, never hectic or clamorous as it might have been with a modern orchestra.

And yet all of these virtues might have gone for naught in other hands. Norrington's distinction on this evening was that he brought to this unusual ensemble a distinct musical finesse, the ability to employ subtleties of phrasing and articulation, crescendo and diminuendo, tension and release—all the traditional tools of the conductor's art—to make a musical argument out of successions of notes on a page. It helps, of course, to have a skilled group of players who work with you regularly. But what Norrington brought to these warhorses is beyond the reach of many permanent music directors of orchestras of much greater reputation.

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CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK

Recuperating Austen

Jane went to Paradise;
    That was only fair.
Good Sir Walter met her first
    And led her up the stair.
Henry and Tobias,
    And Miguel of Spain,
Stood with Shakespeare at the top
    To welcome Jane.

KIPLING ACCOMPANIES HIS HOMAGE TO JANE AUSTEN by a story as far as possible from anything we are likely to associate with a gentlewoman's quiet life in Bath and Hampshire, or with six novels which, as the main narrator of "The Janeites" explains, aren't "adventurous, nor smutty, nor what you'd call even interestin'—all about girls o' seventeen . . . not certain 'oom they'd like to marry; an' their dances and card-parties an' picnics, and their young blokes goin' off to London on 'orseback for 'aircuts and shaves."

The linguistic disparity strikes hard. It is meant to. The Austen critic just quoted is a London hairdresser (hence his alertness to the details of Frank Churchill's barbershop excursion), and a returned soldier. The time is 1920, the place a Masonic Lodge, one of the few peacetime settings where it could be imagined that the masses and the classes could share experience, as for four years they had shared experience in the trenches of France. Ever the virtuoso, Kipling has found out a way to wrench Jane Austen into the Great War, as his Cockney recalls for a lodge brother how it was in the dugout where officers and men of an artillery unit shortly to be blown to bits shared in-group allusions to Austen's novels as the men served, and the officers drank, the post-prandial port that was the sign of their class and their privilege.

The story, as I have just sketched it, can only appear preposterous. Jane Austen in the trenches? Yet she did not appear there by accident; she is there so that Kipling may confront head-on issues that were already troubling him in 1920, and that trouble us increasingly as we head toward the end of our common century: the issues of readership and class. Who reads Jane Austen? And how? (We know, of course, that nobody reads Kipling, but that, as he would say, is another story.) How can we assimilate into our wider world personages and concerns as narrowly class-bound—we would add, gender-bound—as those of these six pellucid novels?

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Kipling shows the difficulties; he chose them. To make the implausible plausible is the virtuoso's work. Since common soldiers did not routinely read Jane Austen in the trenches or anywhere else, Kipling frames a fable. He makes one of the soldiers "a toff by birth," though it only shows when he's drunk, who amid the gas and the shelling of the 1918 German offensive hits upon the idea of initiating his fellow soldier into a secret Society of Janeites. He models it upon the Masons to which they both belong, and the Cockney finds that the privileges of membership are worth the price of admission. A soldier can contradict his superior officer, as long as it's about Jane, and the current password (*Tilniz an' trapdoors*) pays off in Turkish cigarettes from the officers' stores—and in a saving intellectual distraction for men who knew they "couldn't expect to av'rage more than six weeks' longer apiece." So the Cockney works his way up through the " 'igher Degrees, includin' the Charges" ("Every 'dam' thing about Jane is remarkable to a pukka Janeite") and turns out to be no mean critic. His summation, in fact, would fit nicely into any of the books I'm reviewing seventy years later: "They're all on the make," he says, "in a quiet way, in Jane."

But there's more to the story than talk. Kipling knew how to make a plot do its job. The only survivor when his unit is blown apart, the half-dead Cockney is overheard likening a garrulous nurse to Miss Bates. Jane is indeed a password to privilege; she gets him onto a hospital train where there was "no room for a louse," and he lives to tell his Masonic Brethren, "You take it from me. . . . There's no one to touch Jane when you're in a tight place."

Of course it's dismissible, and perhaps we should dismiss it—as a war idyll, a sentimental assertion of the sharing of a culture inherently unshareable, the dream of a toff who needed to convince himself that in the crucible of war, at least, England had been not two nations but one. Who can prescribe the uses of literature, personal and public? We need to think, though, that it has uses; though it is exactly the complaint of Kipling's Cockney that "her characters was no *use*," being "only just like people you run across every day," the story knows that's just the point. Miss Bates *is* just like his Auntie ("good as gold—but *you* know"), and Kipling works it so that it's exactly that perception that saves him.

Unlike his younger contemporary Virginia Woolf, Kipling was not repelled by the reality of class. Born to heteroglossia, he had grown up hearing and valuing the voices of the multiworld of India, and he could hear and value the various voices of England. But he needed very much to believe what Virginia Woolf, for all that Fabian involvement, gave no sign of believing—that "the Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady are sisters under the skin." Which, however implausible, is what you have to believe if you are to believe that Jane Austen is there for everybody, for everybody to make use of.

Yet facts are facts. When I taught *Emma* in a community college,

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students who had been content, even absorbed, in reading *Paradise Lost* asked "Why are we reading this?" My failure? Theirs? Hers? All three? Kipling knew Jane's class limits; why else should his Cockney quote his toff's insistence that her "lawful issue" was " 'Enery James," another writer for whom the lower classes didn't properly exist? Yet by placing "England's Jane" at the top with good Sir Walter and Fielding and Smollett and Cervantes and Shakespeare, Kipling staked for her claims he wouldn't have staked for 'Enery—the old-fashioned claims of scope, universality, the immortality of the classic. And now, with the very idea of the classic under assault as yet another fortress of elitism, what can we claim for Jane Austen? Is this even a question we need to answer, when we can take her over for the Academy, swathe her in reams of papyrus, and preserve her, corpsed, for future generations of graduate students?

For James Thompson as for Kipling, Jane Austen is part of "The Great Tradition," though it is with no friendly hand that he capitalizes the phrase.[1] Novels "continually in print and continually read since 1811" are "simply too familiar"; "we have never had to rediscover or recuperate her work, nor has there been any systematic reassessment of it." "We," naturally, means critics. "Far too often," he complains, "what has passed for criticism . . . is really appreciation." For "if we approach Austen's novels with the aim of showing how good they are, there is little chance that we will ever begin to understand them, because we begin by sharing their assumptions." He cites Fredric Jameson on the "class homogeneity" of those assumptions, and the "restricted class of readers" who share them; such agreement "is not brought back into the world by fiat." So much for Kipling's Masonic idyll.

And so much, too, for appreciation. It is an activity of which no one will be able to accuse Mr. Thompson, though he does concede that of "those many novels from the 1790's, Austen's are the best remembered and perhaps even the best." Janeite outrage, however, should not distract us from an important issue. "No criticism can proceed adequately until it stands outside the unexamined, unrecognized, a priori assumptions within which the work was first conceived."

And really, doesn't that sound as if it had to be true? "We will never see Austen's work clearly if we accept her fiction as right or correct or natural: Rather, we need to see it as explicitly time-bound and historical, not the product of right or truth or nature or even a powerful morality." In short, if you mean to understand a work, get outside it.

C.S. Lewis saw it differently. "The first demand a work of art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the

[1] BETWEEN SELF AND WORLD: The Novels of Jane Austen, by *James Thompson.* Pennsylvania State University Press. $24.95.

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way. (There is no use asking first if the work before you deserves such surrender, because until you have surrendered you cannot possibly find out.)"

"Surrender" is a big demand; to get yourself out of the way, bigger yet. The demand is made upon "us," a considerably larger company than Thompson's "we." Coming from *An Experiment in Criticism*, Lewis' advice certainly includes critics. But it includes the ordinary reader as well. It rests, in fact, on the archaic assumption that there shouldn't be that much difference between them—or us—our common interest being in understanding, from which appreciation may, though it need not, follow. For though self-surrender is essential for Lewis, it is the first demand a work makes upon us, not the only one. If you mean to understand a work, get inside it. To get inside it, of course, we must see the work as time-bound, as historical, because we must surrender to its history, bind ourselves in its time, not our own. Surrender, however, does not enforce acceptance. Afterwards, considering "whether the work . . . deserves such surrender," we are free to "recuperate" it by refusing its notions of nature, right, or truth. But surrender must come first.

For is it really self-evident that coming to a novel from outside is the way to see it clearly? That's how Virginia Woolf came to *Ulysses*. The way she saw it is notorious: "an illiterate underbred book, . . . the book of a self-taught working man, and we all know how distressing they are, how egotistic, insistent, raw, striking, and ultimately nauseating." Kipling may condescend to his Cockney, and sentimentalize class differences by easy erasure. But he would never have written that. Thompson's outside is larger than Bloomsbury's. But as a locus from which to pursue understanding it seems to have served him no better. There may be something to be said for appreciation after all.

The contrast between Austen's voice and Thompson's is more jarringly hetero- than any glossia of Kipling's. What Jane Austen's representation of character does, Thompson tells us, is to "enact bourgeois ideology of the individual subject within a high capitalist, consumer society." From *Northanger Abbey* to *Persuasion*, he sees her novels illustrating, progressively, relentlessly, the "privatization" and "alienation" Georg Lukacs found inherent in the "objectification of social relations under capital." Austen's antidote for this is love, "intimacy, morally corrective union," which "functions to efface the ideological contradiction between social responsibility and private withdrawal," and "serves as the private 'solution' to alienation and the objectification of social relations." Yet since "romance and reification are two sides of the same coin," love isn't much use. The continuing appeal of the novels, Thompson suggests, is due not to any pleasure they might afford us, still less to any assent we might give their notions of nature or truth, but to "our implicit awareness that hers is the first recognizable formulation of modern personal relations." Alienated, isolated, Jane Austen points to the way we live now. No less time-

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bound than she, we stand outside her a priori assumptions only to recuperate her into our own.

Evidently, Thompson's book is bleak reading. Fresh from revisiting the novels, few readers will be convinced that Emma's sociable Hartfield "is a type of Crusoe's island," and Emma herself another Crusoe, an "isolated consciousness," Lukacs' "individual, egotistic bourgeois isolated artificially by capitalism." One suspects that Lukacs somehow did not have that particular Emma in mind. Highbury is not Yonville; Mr. Knightly is not Charles Bovary. Are we to believe there will be no more balls, no more picnics, no more parties when Emma is married? Will Mr. Knightly and his wife cease to interest themselves in the affairs of their neighbors? Apparently. "Objectification is cured . . . by a process of exclusion"; "private withdrawal succeeds social responsibility." So Thompson ends his book with a vision of "Captain Wentworth and Anne Elliot at their reunion, lost amid the public crowd in Bath, as two individual 'souls dancing in private rapture.' " Austen ends *Persuasion* rather differently, with the inclusion of the previously excluded Mrs. Smith, now explicitly identified as Anne's friend *and* her husband's, in the wider society, as Anne glories in being the wife of a sailor, a member of "that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance." Alienation is where you find it.

And if you're looking for it, Freud is, as Thompson says, "helpful." Doubly helpful, in fact. "His clinical vocabulary helps to demystify what Austen calls love," while "the terms of transference provide us with a model" for a heroine's attitudes toward the men in her life. "To analyze such matters, Freud is our most ready guide because our understanding of psychology is formed by the assumptions of psychoanalysis." Never mind the difficulty of finding a university psychology department where those assumptions are now generally accepted. "We" are not psychologists but literary critics. Readers will judge for themselves the degree of illumination afforded by diagnosing "all six of Austen's heroines" as examples of the "two basic manifestations of narcissism," "mirror transference" (Emma, Elizabeth, Elinor) and "idealizing transference" (Anne, Fanny, Catherine). Austen herself is endowed, in a flutter of biographical ifs and must-haves, with a "narcissistic personality structure" and an unrequited family romance to explain it, as her "personal neurosis" reinforces her condition under capitalism to recuperate for the late twentieth-century reader a body of work sufficient to satisfy the gloomiest outsider, and to arouse an ahistorical wonderment that anybody could read it for pleasure—in the trenches or anywhere else.

From one extreme to the other: Park Honan's new biography[2] comes at Jane Austen so thoroughly from inside that he seems to

[2] JANE AUSTEN: Her Life, by *Park Honan*. St. Martin's Press. $24.95.

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forget there's any place else. Honan doesn't theorize about history and psychology, but he knows so much Jane Austen and about the years in which she lived her life and her father and mother and aunts and brothers and sisters and cousins and nieces and nephews and great-nieces and great-nephews lived theirs that you scarcely feel the lack. He knows about the British navy in which two of her brothers, as well as Captain Wentworth, found their careers; he knows about the battle of Trafalgar which Frank Austen missed out on; he knows about the trial of Warren Hastings and what the Austens thought of it; he knows about Jane Austen's cousin Eliza Hancock, who may have been Hastings' daughter and whose husband was guillotined under the Terror and who acted in suggestive amateur theatricals in the Austens' barn, just like *Mansfield Park*. There couldn't be a cosier refuge for a pukka Janeite reeling from an encounter with Thompson's book. There are no less than four genealogical charts. (That of Jane's mother, containing a baron, two knights, and a duke, handily disposes of Thompson's suggestion that her family was only "pseudo-gentry.") Honan has unearthed a great deal of new material—for example, the sixty-odd numbers of the periodical the Austen brothers put out while they were at Oxford, which may have influenced (and been influenced by) their fourteen-year-old sister, and witty verses by Jane Austen's mother, who turns out to have been a spunky lady not given to repining at the transition from her aristocratic background to her hard-working life as the wife of a country parson in a house with "a cellar that regularly flooded and a patchwork of cracked and exposed rafters." She is an attractive figure among her cows (six) and chickens and ducks and children (eight), and I was disappointed when Honan, like Thompson, used the novels to argue that Jane didn't like her. But we needn't be bound by Honan's conclusions; from his extraordinary richness of detail, we can draw our own. This must be from now on the standard biography.

You do, though, have to be a pukka Janeite to read it. Every dam' thing about Jane is remarkable to Honan. Nobody is likely to come closer to reconstructing Jane Austen's world and the people and places in it. But after twenty chapters crammed with such sentences as "As likely as not Mrs. Penelope Lutley Sclater came bustling over from Tangier Park," one may well feel trapped in a Jane Austen novel written at Tolstoyan length by a Miss Bates with total recall.

Happily, Claudia Johnson's book provides a middle way.[3] Like Honan, she has been able to inhabit the novels, like them, enjoy them, come at them from inside. Yet she is no mere appreciator, still less a Procrustean theoretician, still less a pointilliste of facts. She is the best kind of scholar-critic. Rather than standing outside Austen's assump-

[3] JANE AUSTEN: Women, Politics, and the Novel, by *Claudia Johnson*. University of Chicago Press. $27.50.

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tions, she asks us (the inclusive us, scholars, critics, and readers who may be neither) to discover with her what those assumptions really were. We might have thought, after reading Honan, that our knowledge of them was complete. But Johnson has taken us into Austen's mind as well as her life and times. She has examined, not her brothers' juvenilia, but works we know she read and valued as an adult, the vast and popular literature written by her female contemporaries. " 'Only a novel!' " she wrote in *Northanger Abbey*. "In short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed . . . in the best chosen language." Reading the forgotten novels of these largely forgotten women with a consciousness of the turbulent times in which they wrote, Johnson finds in Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Inchbald, Hannah More, Sophia King, Amelia Opie, Mary Hays, Charlotte Smith, Frances Burney (who did not just write *Evelina*) an unexplored fund of ideas with which Austen's work is in dialogue. From novels with titles like *Belinda* and *Cecilia*, Johnson recreates for us a complex political discourse. "A consciousness of how the private is political, and a sensitivity to the problems women writers encounter living and writing in a male-dominated culture" will show that "few ostensibly 'historical' truths are as stubbornly persistent and as entirely *a*historical as the belief that with the exception of a few unseemly radicals, Austen and her ladylike contemporaries were not . . . concerned with the moral implications of gender distinctions, and that, as a sensible woman, Austen never mixed with the political debates of her time." Novelists in the years following the French Revolution had dealt explicitly with "politically charged" material; Johnson shows us how, in a time of "anti-Jacobin" reaction—Jane Austen's years—they found ways to use it "in an exploratory and interrogative, rather than hortatory and prescriptive manner." If primogeniture, the inadequacy or tyranny of fathers, the unreliability of brothers, the dependency of daughters, regularly animate the plots of Austen's novels, perhaps we should pay attention. *Mansfield Park*'s skepticism of the patriarchal family is no passing shadow; it was there in *Sense and Sensibility*, and will be there in *Persuasion*. The new readings that emerge from Johnson's impeccably researched, judicious book show us that the familiar novels of England's Jane, that national treasure, do at least as much to challenge the status quo as to affirm it.

Claudia Johnson's study should persuade us to open the annals of intellectual history to novels that few of us have read and that virtually no one has taken seriously. With a quiet felicity of style and a welcome avoidance of overstatement, Johnson not only identifies concerns and responses invisible to us, but convinces us that these are not scholarly illusions, but living facts that modify conclusively our understanding of texts we thought we knew. She pries open our assumptions with another telling quotation from *Northanger Abbey*: "To come with a well-informed mind is to come with an inability of ministering to the vanity of others, which a sensible person would always wish to avoid.

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A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can." How well Austen concealed her well-informed mind is shown by the pervasive condescension that has accompanied two centuries of critical praise. If "dear Aunt Jane," as one Victorian critic called her, made it into the canon, it was "on terms which cast doubt on her qualifications for entry and which ensure that her continued presence there be regarded as an act of gallantry." She told her talentless nephew that she worked on two inches of ivory; we believed her. R.W. Chapman certainly did; glossing her work with appendices full of fashions and Regency accoutrements, leaving allusions to London riots or the Antigua slave trade unexplored, his standard edition "created the author [it] presumed." The Austen Claudia Johnson creates is very different. Yet she is no alienated late-twentieth-century stranger, but a woman of sense and sensibility whom the admiring Janeite will find entirely recognizable as she responds ironically, moderately, judiciously, and discreetly to the issues of her day.

Such an Austen is far from Honan's High Tory, equally far from Thompson's neurotic isolated by the twin juggernauts of historical and psychic determinism. Having read Johnson's book, I think now I would have a better answer if a student from outside the pale of privilege asked me "Why are we reading this?" The urge of education is the urge to share what we value. Is it an urge we should honor? Indulge? Repudiate as a mechanism of class domination? Johnson has helped me recuperate Kipling's answer from the mists of sentiment. We are reading this, perhaps, to discover how much a brilliant and not wholly fortunate woman can teach us about how to live within bounds, how to recognize them, even display them as bounds, and still not find them a prison, and still do one's serious, amused, responsible best to live well inside them and stretch them a little for those who come after. Whatever your class, whatever your gender, I can't think history or psychology will render that lesson obsolete. Unswathe the papyrus. Start in on *Northanger Abbey* and read right through to the end of *Persuasion*. Limits straiten us all. And there's no one to touch Jane when you're in a tight place.

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JOSEPH FRANK

Tolstoyevsky

TOLSTOY AND DOSTOEVSKY WERE BORN WITHIN A FEW YEARS of each other (the first in 1828, the second in 1821), and both rose to fame during the same stretch of nineteenth-century Russian history. (Tolstoy, of course, overlapped with the twentieth century, and his public influence reached an apogee in his very last years.) Even though they never met (though they were once in the same auditorium, attending a lecture by Vladimir Soloviev, and could have been introduced by a mutual friend), they were of course very much aware of each other's presence on the literary scene. Indeed, they could hardly help being so since they published in the same journal, and it almost defies credulity to realize that, in 1866, the subscribers to the fiercely anti-radical *The Russian Messenger* could turn, in alternating months, from the beginning chapters of *War and Peace* to the chapters of *Crime and Punishment* that the impoverished Dostoevsky was supplying at a considerably smaller fee per folio sheet than the well-heeled Tolstoy was receiving. Such textual contiguity only dramatizes the close relations between the two that were felt to exist throughout their lives, and which has made the juxtaposition of their life and work a set piece of Russian criticism and of all those who write on the history of modern Russian culture.

At the beginning of the present century, in a major work that has still not lost its interest, Dmitry Merejkowski worked out a sharp contrast between them in the religious-philosophical dichotomies favored by Russian Symbolism. Dostoevsky was the seer of the spirit, Tolstoy the seer of the flesh; the one expresses his highest ideals in the visionary ecstasies of Prince Myshkin, the other in Natasha's triumphant brandishing of the stained nappy of her child in the concluding pages of *War and Peace*. Innumerable variations have been rung on this dualism ever since, and the two writers have been opposed to each other in a seemingly infinite variety of ways. The very latest, or at least currently the most influential, is that of Mikhail Bakhtin, who translated this opposition into what now is called narratological terms. Dostoevsky is the creator of a new kind of "polyphonic novel," in which characters are allowed to express the individuality of their own world view without being confined by predetermined authorial purposes. Tolstoy, on the other hand, is the greatest exemplar of the more usual "homophonic novel," in which the presence of the author is always felt as a guiding and shaping force. This is not exactly the spirit and the flesh, but it would not take too much effort to work this

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distinction around to approximate such a sense (figural freedom as the spirit, authorial constraint as the flesh).

More recently, Russian criticism has been inclined to focus on the similarities rather than the differences between these two colossi of their recent past. A well-known Soviet critic and Dostoevsky specialist, G. M. Fridlender, in an informative volume of essays called *Dostoevsky and World Literature (Dostoevskii i Mirovaya Literatura*, 1979), includes a chapter on the two writers which stresses exactly this point. As they both recede into the past, Fridlender remarks, what strikes one is the similarity of their thematic preoccupations with the moral-psychic dilemmas of the Russian educated class, and their identical sense of the breakup of the old moral and social order that created the need for that class to seek for new values among the people. Each of course pursued this common task in his own way and on his own artistic terms, though with, it should be added, a sort of inverse relationship in their development. Dostoevsky began as a radical who did not shrink before the idea of revolution, and ended as a firm, if not uncritical, supporter of the Russian state in its existing form; Tolstoy as a young man accepted all the social political attitudes of his gentry milieu, and ended, as even Lenin recognized, by helping significantly to undermine the moral authority of the Tsarist régime.

Each also valued the other's work, though Dostoevsky, while expressing great (and probably genuine) admiration for *Anna Karenina*, also attacked it because of Tolstoy's criticism of the volunteer movement to help the Serbians against the Turks in 1876. One of the best definitions of their relationship is given by Dostoevsky himself in *A Raw Youth*, in which his character Versilov speaks of Tolstoy as "the psychologist of the [Russian] nobility's soul" in all its *blagoobrazhie* (beauty of form or appearance), which is based on a certain stability of tradition. The characters of Dostoevsky's own works, who have no such inheritance on which they can draw, and live in a world of "accidentality" from a moral point of view, therefore lack the appeal of such outer grace and harmony. But Dostoevsky was persuaded that only *he* was the true portraitist of the contemporary state of the Russian moral-social psyche, while Tolstoy was primarily a chronicler of the glories of the past. It is significant that, in his last full-scale novel *Resurrection*, Tolstoy tried to compete with Dostoevsky on his rival's own terms and in relation to the work of his that Tolstoy admired the most, *House of the Dead*. "*Resurrection*," writes the English novelist and critic A. N. Wilson, "is both a homage to Dostoevsky's descriptions of Siberia and a proud artistic assertion that Tolstoy can write with the same vigour about prison villages, convoys and punishment blocks as he had, in his prime, written about ballrooms and battlefields."

Wilson's new life of Tolstoy[1] is a very lively and readable book,

[1] TOLSTOY, by *A. N. Wilson*. W. W. Norton: $25.00; Fawcett Columbine: $14.95p.

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which exhibits (unlike some other works by English men of letters on Russian writers) a wide-ranging knowledge of Russian literature in the original, and also a considerable acquaintance with Russian history and the problems of Russian culture. Wilson's work is constantly enriched and enlivened by this familiarity with the social-cultural and historical background, and particularly by the many comparisons he makes with the contemporary Soviet Russian situation to illustrate one or another facet of Tolstoy's career. He writes easily and well, and manages to convey a satisfactory overall sense of his enormous subject by avoiding excessive biographical detail and working mainly on the level of analysis and interpretation of the sparsely sketched factual framework. The book reads more like a mammoth personal essay on Tolstoy, by a sympathetic but by no means uncritical commentator, than as an ordinary biography—a remark meant to be the very opposite of a criticism, though a reader looking for detailed information should go elsewhere.

Tolstoy's life is of course an epic by itself, and Wilson vividly sketches in the contours with a good deal of appreciation. There is the young man born into the highest circles of the Russian gentry, who had the right to look down on the Romanovs themselves as relative upstarts, but belonging to a branch of the family that was impoverished and relatively *déclassé*. Tolstoy never forgot, however, that he was the equal, if not the superior, to those who sat on the Russian throne, and his "instinctive reaction to things," as Wilson notes, "was always that of a landed aristocrat, who enjoyed the almost monarchical independence afforded by being lord of his estates and governor of his people's destiny." This supreme self-confidence, this instinctive arrogance and almost unself-conscious lordliness that so enraged the literary contemporaries who tried to be his friends (he once almost fought a duel with Turgenev), was oddly allied with a longing for spiritual quietude that can be traced back to his childhood years. His older brother Nikolay had invented a game called the Ant Brotherhood, which disclosed the secret of the way "for all men to cease suffering from any misfortune, to leave off quarrelling or being angry, and become continuously happy." This secret was supposed to have been inscribed on a green stick buried near a ravine on the Tolstoy estate at Yasnaya Polyana; and Tolstoy later asked to be interred at that spot. His final wishes were punctiliously observed.

Most of the titanic tensions of Tolstoy's life can be encapsulated within the poles of this antinomy. For Tolstoy approached the entire world of human culture, history and life, which he could portray with such unsurpassed mastery, as an almost Godlike lord of everything he surveyed. It is little wonder that Gorky, who was not known for excessive reverence, should have said, after spending some time with the aged Tolstoy: "This man is like a God." And it was as a God, a capricious Jehovah, that Tolstoy exhibited what Wilson amusingly calls his "bronchitis-is-a-metal" attitude, an assertion of the obviously

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absurd and ridiculous, or the highly contestable and impossibly reductive, which he insisted on as truth just because *he* had stated it to be so. He called bronchitis a metal in a quarrel with Turgenev, perhaps as the result of a verbal error less nonsensical in Russian than in English; but Wilson speaks of its "surreal appropriateness" all the same. "Tolstoy would spend many years of his life trying to persuade people that Shakespeare was no good; that Jesus wasn't a Christian; that folksongs were better than Beethoven, and that property is theft—in other words, preaching the important gospel that bronchitis is a metal."

The imperiousness of his convictions knew no bounds once he had determined on them, and he refused to budge an inch from whatever path he had chosen under their influence (even if it meant, in the latter part of his life, that his relations with his wife became a literal inferno about which it is painful even to read). But there was also his longing for a world in which the ideals of the Ant Brotherhood would be realized, and in which the complications and travails of existence could be miraculously resolved by the secret imparted to the little green stick. No wonder he cherished a lifelong devotion to Rousseau, whom Wilson says "was the greatest single influence on the development of Tolstoy's thought." Whether, as he once let it be known, he had ever worn a medallion around his neck as a young man with Rousseau's portrait, remains apocryphal. There can be no doubt, however, that the Rousseauian ideal, the ideal of a complete and total symbiosis between man and the larger forces of nature and the universe in which he was so anomalously embedded, constantly hovered before him as an ever-elusive goal. This ideal is embodied in such characters as Daddy Yeroshka in *The Cossacks* (a work too little appreciated, though Wilson rightly ranks it very high) and, far better known, Platon Karataev in *War and Peace*. Tolstoy's work might be described as the gigantic effort of the Godlike Russian *barin* to bully the remainder of mankind into accepting such figures as the image of *its* ideal.

Tolstoy is first and foremost a great writer, though any account of his life cannot neglect his tremendous influence as a moral force and, in effect, the founder of what was meant to be a new religion, a form of Christianity purified of its irrational excrescences and quite close to various radical forms of Protestantism. Wilson rather gives the impression that Tolstoy somehow stumbled into being a writer for lack of anything better to do, or rather, as a way of coming to terms with what was lacking in his own life, or such aspects of it as he could not bear openly to acknowledge. "Tolstoy was to grow up and become a great novelist," he writes in his introduction, "that is to say a great liar. Novels are works of art which arrive at truth by telling untruths. Novelists are frequently men and women who have been compelled, by some inner disaster, to rewrite the past, to refashion their memories, to make their existence more interesting or more explicable to

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themselves." It is from such a point of view that Wilson approaches Tolstoy's novels, which allows him to integrate them into his biographical account through illustrating the gap between historical fact and its artistic recreation. Naturally, this sharply limits his perspective on them as works of art, though as a novelist and literary critic himself, with a wide-ranging knowledge of literature (he stresses the influence of English predecessors such as Sterne, Dickens, Thackeray and Trollope), Wilson's remarks are usually apt and often insightful (he makes a very suggestive comparison between *The Cossacks* and Scott's *Waverley*, for example).

For anyone already familiar with some of the abundant literature on Tolstoy's life and work, what is most likely to be attractive about Wilson's book, aside from its general intelligence and sympathetic good sense, is the constant interweaving of the Russian past of Tolstoy's day with the Soviet present by which it has been replaced. Many of Tolstoy's answers to the problems of the modern world, his attempt to cope with them through the advocacy of pacifism and anarchism, are quite rightly seen by Wilson to be simply silly and irrelevant; but there was, all the same, an inherent humanity about them that contrasts very favorably with what triumphed in their stead. And Tolstoy himself, as an individual, embodied this same humanity by the very inconsistency of his behavior. One example is his response to the famine of 1891, when he abandoned his own principles (he had argued that handouts to the poor from the rich only aggravated the problems of the peasants), and organized relief efforts in his own district with the help of his wife, also sending his sons to undertake relief work in a neighboring area. For two years the entire Tolstoy family worked unstintingly in organizing soup kitchens and medical aid, stirring other landowners to do so by their example, and prodding the whole country into action. Tolstoy also wrote an article, *A Terrible Question*, which brought down the wrath of the government and led to talk of exiling him to England (shades of Solzhenitsyn!).

As a sidelight on this episode, Wilson offers the following observation: "While Lev Lvovich Tolstoy [a son] organized his famine relief in the Samara district in 1891–92, there was one very conspicuous absentee from his band of helpers: Lenin, who was at that time in 'internal exile' there. He was said to have welcomed the famine 'as a factor in breaking down the peasantry and creating an industrial proletariat.' Trotsky, too, took the line that it was improper to do anything to improve the lot of the people while the autocracy remained in power. When they themselves seized power, the chaos and desolation became immeasurably worse." Wilson goes on to give the evidence for this last point: there is no need to cite the appalling figures.

Geir Kjetsaa, a Norwegian Slavist with a special interest in Dosto-

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evsky, has undertaken to supply a more up-to-date one-volume life than has been previously available.[2] His book is based on wide and thorough research in the sources and the secondary literature, and can be recommended as a reliable guide to the main events of Dostoevsky's life. Kjetsaa is much more interested than Wilson in supplying information, and in turning his subject's life into a narrative that moves along at a very fast clip in quite a readable fashion. He places himself, by and large, in Dostoevsky's own point of view as he conceives it, and often summarizes his material by conveying it as Dostoevsky's own thoughts; this comes very close to the technique of the once-popular *vie romancée*, but Kjetsaa avoids its worst excesses by usually basing himself on reliable documentary evidence. Sometimes, however, when he uses a novel to guide his speculations, the results are exceedingly dubious—as when he takes the underground man's sadistic treatment of Liza in *Notes from Underground*, for example, as a clue to Dostoevsky's relations with his young mistress Apollinaria Suslova. There is, after all, a difference between art and life, and biographers should not incautiously identify one with the other.

For the most part, though, Kjetsaa sticks to what can reasonably be supposed true, and makes a laudable effort to correct earlier misinterpretations in the light of the latest researches. He rejects the usual view, popularized by Freud, that Dr. Dostoevsky was a tyrannical monster who inspired more than the usual parricidal Oedipal feelings in his gifted and fiery second son; and he also outlines the new reasons for believing that Dr. Dostoevsky actually died of an apoplectic stroke and was not murdered by his peasants at all. The court records of the investigation of the death, now newly available, have made the report of the murder very hard to accept; nor is there anything to prove (quite the contrary!) that Dostoevsky, as Freud also believed, suffered his first epileptic attack on learning of his father's supposed murder. Kjetsaa rejects all attempts to interpret Dostoevsky in such terms, and in general is himself more concerned with depiction than with analysis or explanation.

In fact, however, what seems to underlie his own conception of Dostoevsky is a psychological image quite close to the Freudian one but shorn of its psychoanalytic underpinnings. This image emerges as he gives the history of Dostoevsky's involvement, through the Petrashevsky circle, with a plot to foment a peasant revolution against serfdom, which led to Dostoevsky's arrest, conviction and sentence to prison-camp in Siberia. One can find certain inconsistencies in what Kjetsaa tells us of Dostoevsky's social-political convictions at this time (on the one hand, he is clearly an active underground revolutionary; on the other, he is said to be "a typical follower of Fourier's ideas,

[2] FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY: A Writer's Life, by *Geir Kjetsaa*. Trans. by *Siri Hustwedt* and *David McDuff*. Elisabeth Sifton Books/Viking. $24.95.

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socialism 'without hate or struggle' "), but his depiction of the Petrashevsky circle and its aftermath is otherwise quite reliable. The mock execution to which Dostoevsky was exposed proved to be a revelatory experience; and the letter he wrote immediately afterward, on returning to prison, is, as Kjetsaa writes in a key phrase, "a hymn to the joy that is found in suffering." Actually, it seems to me more a hymn to the ecstatic joy of being alive than a celebration of the joy found in suffering itself. In any case, this becomes a clue for Kjetsaa to the significance of what occurred to Dostoevsky in Siberia, and to the reshaping of his later life.

"This examination of himself [during his prison-years] led the former rebel to gain a new respect for the authority of the Tsar and a faith in the sacred mission of the Church for the Russian people. By taking upon himself the great suffering of atonement for what he now considered a youthful error, Dostoevsky experienced the cathartic power of his own suffering. And he became convinced that it was precisely this suffering that was the deepest need of the Russian people." Of course matters were much more complicated than that, and what Kjetsaa depicts here is a much more long-drawn-out process. But "suffering" and the problem of suffering did stand at the center of Dostoevsky's world, and the great issue of theodicy, the question of why evil and suffering exist in a world created by a God of love and mercy, never ceased to haunt his thoughts and inspire his work. Indeed, the same question can be seen even in his pre-Siberian phase, except that then he portrayed it primarily in moral-social terms; later, it came to take on a more religious-philosophical dimension.

The problem of suffering in the mature Dostoevsky, however, is always tied up with that of freedom, the moral autonomy of the human personality. For Dostoevsky had also learned in Siberia that such freedom was a primordial need of the human spirit, and that mankind would seek satisfaction of this need even, if necessary, against all the constraints of reason, common sense and self-interest. It is the tension between these two themes that makes up the fierce dynamism and dramatism of Dostoevsky's creative world (so different in this respect from Tolstoy's), and Kjetsaa does not, in my view, sufficiently stress the importance of this theme of freedom in relation to that of suffering. It was, however, the basis of Dostoevsky's sympathy with the great rebels of his works, but also of his opposition to the radical ideology that denied the very existence of any such innate human moral-psychological need. It was also the basis of his belief that only a Christ, whose message appealed to mankind *freely* to choose good over evil, and to follow his example of self-sacrifice, could provide the foundation for any kind of enduring social harmony.

Kjetsaa's treatment of Dostoevsky's novels says very little about their literary quality and hardly anything at all about the characters or the

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action; he generally confines himself to certain thematic aspects which, in some instances, seem quite arbitrarily chosen. Non-specialist readers, for whom he is presumably writing, are likely to feel the need for something closer to the concrete issues embodied in the works themselves. *The Idiot* is not really *about* the Gospel of St. John, even though it certainly has some connection with this text, nor is *The Devils* best approached as an allegory inspired by the Book of Revelation. What would be suitable for a specialized study of Dostoevsky's relation to New Testament sources (Kjetsaa has apparently published a work of this kind in Norwegian), seems out of place tacked on to so circumstantial an account of Dostoevsky's life.

Even though Kjetsaa's narrative approach for the most part excludes references to the present, he does slip in occasional remarks similar to those of Wilson; the once-fearsome horrors of the Tsarist régime pale into insignificance before the more systematic and efficient iniquities of their Soviet successors. Nor, on the subject of this relation of past and present, can I help speculating myself on the possible role played by the two writers under discussion in the present cultural ferment taking place in the Soviet Union.

This ferment, all observers agree, is marked by a noticeable revival of interest in the religious aspects of Russian culture—a revival of everything against which the Marxist-Leninists have been fighting (unsuccessfully, it would now seem) for more than half a century. Could part of the reason for this failure simply be the existence of writers like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky? They formed, after all, a good part of the basis of Russian humanistic education; and all the strenuous efforts of the critical establishment to show up their weaknesses and shortcomings (which certainly exist) have been to no avail against the power of their genius in keeping alive a sense for the ultimate problems of human existence—the problems which, as Dostoevsky wrote about *Anna Karenina*, doctors have no power to heal and on which only He who knows the meaning of the mystery of earthly life can pronounce a final judgment. Literature may thus, in the long run, have provided a massive antidote to Marxist-Leninist indoctrination—an antidote whose effects are only now, with the new Gorbachevian *glasnost*, beginning to become highly visible.

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GARY KRIST

Serendipity

I FIRST CAME UPON THE WORD "SERENDIPITOUS" serendipitously. I was looking up the spelling of "sequoia" in my dictionary—for a junior high school paper, if I remember correctly—and, well, I got distracted. The words in sequoia's vicinity were fascinating: Seraglio, the place in a Mohammedan palace where the wives and concubines are secluded. Serein, a very fine rain falling from a clear sky after sunset. And serendipitous, defined as good, beneficial, favorable; come upon by accident; of or pertaining to the making of desirable but unsought discoveries. The fact that I unearthed this last word in such a self-referential way seemed almost incredibly auspicious. So I adopted the word, used it three times and it was mine. That evening, I referred to my older brother's unexpected absence from the dinner table as "a serendipitous development."

The idea of serendipity has been with me ever since, informing my travels, my movie-going, and especially my reading habits. Some of my favorite books have been those I've plucked almost at random off the bookstore shelves, or found under piles of sandy newspapers in beach houses, or been sent accidentally by somewhat disorganized book clubs. Hence the particular joy of the *Hudson Review* fiction chronicle. Books begin turning up miraculously in my mailbox. Most of them I've heard about; some I've even been intending to read. But my final selection of books to review is determined largely by whim. I examine typefaces. I look deep within myself and decide whether the world really needs another discussion of E. L. Doctorow's latest. And I read lots of page ones. The results of this rather arbitrary selection process—whether serendipitous or not—are reported here.

Reviewing books in this way can be an exhilarating experience. By ignoring what "They" tell me is a worthwhile book to read ("They" being my friends, editors, *The New York Times Book Review*, and all other sources of literary gospel), I can turn reading into an expression of independence, or even defiance. After all, reading, like writing, should always be a little subversive.

My first encounter with the work of British writer Jim Crace was a textbook illustration of serendipity. I chanced upon his debut book, *Continent*, in the library and decided that it looked interesting (OK, I liked the jacket art). The book turned out to be one of the most adventurous, intellectually provocative fictions I had read in a long

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time. So when *The Gift of Stones*,[1] Crace's second book, turned up in my mailbox, I grabbed it immediately (despite the fact that I hated the jacket art). The verdict? One of the most adventurous, intellectually provocative fictions I've read since *Continent*. If he continues producing books like these, Crace may turn out to be one of the most original writers in our language, and the fact that he remains so little known in this country strikes me as profoundly unfair.

To describe *The Gift of Stones* as a parable about the act of storytelling might make the novel sound a bit precious, but the characterization is accurate. Crace begins with a germ idea suggested by his epigraph—an account of archeologists discovering the skeletal lower arm of a child in a pile of flints—and spins his tale from there, "inventing reasons why the arm was there, and what the fate had been of that child's other bones." The result is a story set in an imaginary prehistoric village of stonecutters, where a boy struck by an arrow loses his infected arm to an amputator's stone knife. Finding himself one-armed in a community where two arms are necessary for the ordinary work of life, the boy is useless—until his idle wanderings beyond the confines of his village yield up an unexpected calling for him. He returns with wild tales of the outside world, storyteller's lies that ease the monotony of the stonecutters' mundane labors. He performs the same role, the author implies, that Crace himself does, providing his fellows with imaginative fictions through which and by which they can live a fuller existence.

All of this is told with great economy and charm, in the naive yet evocative language of parable. Crace's paragraphs read almost like poetic stanzas; his lines are cleanly imagistic, rife with approximate rhyme, and occasionally even metrical. As it turns out, this stylized prose proves necessary to carry the full weight of the author's allegorical intentions, which become increasingly ambitious as the novel unfolds. Crace wants to grant storytelling a much larger function than that of merely providing entertainment or even emotional fulfillment. When the arrival of bronze implements puts the skilled but unadaptable stonecutters out of business, they turn to the talkative amputee for nothing less than the reinvention of their lives. The novel ends with the storyteller leading the population out of the now defunct village to parts unknown, heavy with his new responsibility of imagining their future. Of course, this rather inflated portrait of the role played by imagination in pushing civilization forward is probably just another storyteller's lie, but it's a lie we can enjoy believing in, at least for a moment.

[1] THE GIFT OF STONES, by *Jim Crace*. Charles Scribner's Sons. $16.95.

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Another small book with large ambitions is *Accident: A Day's News* by the East German writer Christa Wolf.[2] Actually, this is less a novel than a 100-page meditation on life in the technocentric world of the late twentieth century. It all takes place on a single day in April 1986—the day a radioactive cloud approaches Europe from the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl, and the day the narrator's brother must undergo a dangerous surgical procedure to remove a brain tumor. These two anxieties form the disturbing *ostinato* that underlies the narrator's various musings as she attempts to go about her usual business.

However, this is not a day for usual business, to say the least. Even though everything may look normal from the outside—the sun is shining, the lettuce in the garden continues to grow—there are fundamental dangers crowding the edges of this woman's existence. The fact that they are not announced by exploding bombs or panic in the streets just makes them more insidious, since these dangers threaten to change the way she sees just about everything from now on:

> But now, I thought while peeling the boiled potatoes, it should be interesting to see which poet would be the first to dare sing the praises of a white cloud. An invisible cloud of a completely different substance had seized the attention of our feelings—completely different feelings. And, I thought once again with that dark, malicious glee, it has knocked the white cloud of poetry into the archives. It has, in the space of a day, broken that and almost every other spell.

One of this novel's many strengths is Wolf's incisive exploration of her narrator's helplessness. This character's life, like all of our lives, has been surrendered involuntarily into the hands of self-declared experts. She is at the mercy of the physicists, doctors, politicians, and other assorted shamans of our culture. What lifts her situation to the level of tragedy is the fact that, while she is helpless to change the forces impinging on her life (making them look a lot like fate), she is intelligent and articulate enough to discern their workings and trace their repercussions. This combination of powerlessness and deep understanding is quite potent, making for a far-reaching social criticism that is both dramatic and human. That Wolf can accomplish all of this in the space of such a short book is extremely impressive.

But not all of my unsought discoveries this quarter were quite as serious as these first two books. I also encountered the likes of James Kaplan's *Pearl's Progress*.[3] I have to admit that, after reading the flap

[2] ACCIDENT: A Day's News, by *Christa Wolf*. Trans. by *Heike Schwarzbauer* and *Rick Takvorian*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $15.95.

[3] PEARL'S PROGRESS, by *James Kaplan*. Alfred A. Knopf. $18.95.

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copy of this first novel (something I usually force myself to avoid), I very nearly tossed it on the "No" pile without further ado. According to the publisher, the book is about the "odd spurts of hilarity and curious twists of fate" experienced by one Philip Pearl, a failed poet from New York who travels south to take on a teaching assignment at Pickett State University in Pickett, Mississippi. Uh-oh, my mind said at this point, Southern Gothic. Normally, I hear those two words and instantly reach for the No-Doz. And is there anything more tired than this particular subgenre, the tale of the bewildered outsider adrift among the backy-chewing rednecks, airheaded beauties, overweight good old boys, and other assorted grotesques who seem to throng the literary landscape south of the Mason-Dixon line?

But I gave the book a try anyway, and by page 40 I had already thrown aside my initial prejudices. Yes, Kaplan has rounded up the usual suspects from the Southern Gothic (and a few from another overworked genre—the academic comedy), but he's softened their edges a bit, rounded out their flatness, humanized them. And Philip Pearl himself is a wonderful character. He reminds me of one of Saul Bellow's irrepressibly energetic protagonists, minus the cosmic belly-aching; where Bellow's people fret about the decline of Western Civilization, Pearl is vexed by whether he should telephone an undergraduate bombshell for a date.

Pearl's perceptions, as reported in Kaplan's rich yet effortless prose, are what make this novel worthwhile. Try this, for instance:

> They entered a locker room. Like the lobby, it was pile carpeted, yet at the first unmistakable acrid hint of chlorine in the air, something caught in Pearl's chest, and something in him was back in the primal locker room of high school, a terror-filled jumble of cold cement, clanging metal, zoo smells. And the whiff of chlorine presaging an even worse horror, just beyond: a blurred—for Pearl had had to leave his precious glasses behind—shimmering reeking trapezoid of aquamarine, the color of pure fear.

Somehow, Pearl manages to be acutely observant and yet endearingly befuddled at the same time. How does Kaplan do this? Could it be the abundance of rhetorical questions? *More likely it's the italicized sentences that emphasize Pearl's frustrated internal dialogue.* No! It must be all of those exclamation marks!! Whatever the method, Pearl as guide makes even this well-worn territory seem fresh.

Now if he only had a plot. *Pearl's Progress* reads like a much longer novel that has been cut without much attempt to preserve continuity. Pearl's romance with a gorgeous but elusive coed named Francesca proceeds by fits and starts; I found myself continually flipping back to see if I had missed a scene somewhere. And too much of the narrative hangs on some ominous mystery about her that never really becomes clear. Many chapters end (tediously) with one of Pearl's colleagues

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issuing him a veiled warning about his would-be sweetheart, but Pearl never bothers to pin them down by asking just what exactly they're talking about. And then Francesca simply disappears, with only the barest of explanations from our author, while Pearl turns to other matters. No, good prose and an appealing sensibility can carry a book only so far. *Pearl's Progress* ultimately fails, but not before providing its generous share of pleasure. I'll be looking for James Kaplan's second book.

Tatyana Tolstaya's first collection of stories, *On the Golden Porch*,[4] provides another decidedly mixed pleasure. The author is the great-grandniece of Leo Tolstoy (a fact I wouldn't bring up were it not trumpeted in her author's note), and she writes ripe, honey-stuffed, sunset-orange prose about those times of life that writers are always insisting are particularly magical and poignant—childhood and old age. But I can't help feeling that Uncle Leo would be disappointed in these stories. Virtuoso performances of impressionism they may be, but they lack even the most rudimentary traces of the social and psychological complexities that make nineteenth-century Russian realism the standard against which all fiction is ultimately judged. Tolstaya's world, while extravagantly rich on the sensual level, is so poor in philosophical scope that she seems capable of drawing from it just one insight—that our romantic fantasies, while nourishing and perhaps even necessary for survival, must inevitably come face to face with the mundane reality they attempt to transcend. This single, not terribly sophisticated thought is played out again and again in the thirteen stories that make up this volume.

"Okkervil River," for instance, centers on a man whose collection of old recordings sung by a long-forgotten chanteuse gives his banal existence its only touch of poetry. Working up his courage one day, he decides to go and pay homage to her in person. On the way over, he falls prey to an elaborate fantasy about his visit—the old singer will be frail and tearful among the teacups, and ever so grateful to him, her passionate knight, the only person who remembers her glory days. When he arrives, however, she proves to be a loud, vulgar, and manipulative old sow surrounded by her own scruffy entourage. Meanwhile, in "Date with a Bird," little Petya is smitten with a neighbor named Tamila, an "enchanted beauty with a magical name [who] lived on a light blue glass mountain with impenetrable walls, so high up you could see the whole world. . . ." His saccharine fantasies of meeting her in a magical garden are interrupted only by the boorish comments of his despised Uncle Borya. More and more, Petya contrasts his dull, restricted home life with his dreams of that life of freedom and beauty he would lead with Tamila on her

[4] ON THE GOLDEN PORCH, by *Tatyana Tolstaya*. Trans. by *Antonina W. Bouis*. Alfred A. Knopf. $17.95.

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mountain—until those dreams are dashed one night when he discovers his beloved Tamila in bed with none other than, you guessed it, Uncle Borya himself! And then there's the frustrated female suburbanite in "The Fakir" who lives vicariously through the adventures of a flamboyant acquaintance. She later discovers this romantic figure to be a pathological liar. . . .

Of course, I'm making these stories sound lamer than they really are, but I don't think I'm exaggerating their thematic monotony. Tatyana Tolstaya has the ability to write splendidly, if rather sentimentally, about some very interesting lives. Until she looks more deeply into the complexities of those lives, however, she'll continue to produce prettified watercolors when her subjects deserve darker, fully nuanced oils.

Now, at this point in my quest for serendipity (an oxymoron if ever there was one), I made an important realization: If I intentionally avoided all of the books deemed "major" by the powers-that-be, I would be allowing those powers to control my reading habits almost as surely as if I read *only* the books so deemed. With this in mind, I picked up Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*,[5] the publication of which was one of those literary events we read about from time to time. And, well, the powers were right on this one. *Cat's Eye* is mature work by an undeniably major writer. Atwood, like E.L. Doctorow, has an uncanny ability to be both intellectually stimulating and emotionally satisfying at the same time. And her work has a strong social dimension beyond the individual psychology that seems to be the exclusive focus of so many other contemporary North American novels.

The book is a first-person narrative told by Elaine Risley, a forties-ish painter (she doesn't like the word "artist") who returns to her hometown of Toronto for a retrospective show of her work. This, however, is merely the frame of the story; most of the book consists of Elaine's retrospective of her own life—primarily of her childhood in a Toronto much different from the glitzy, allegedly world-class city she sees today. Atwood's Toronto of the forties, fifties, and sixties is a virtual pressure cooker of traditional socialization; the author is adept at portraying the subtle but powerful forces molding little girls into proper ladies and little boys into, well, whatever it is that little boys become (Elaine can never quite pin that down). What makes Atwood's depiction controversial is that the people doing the molding here are not men, but rather other women. These other women take many forms throughout the book, but they appear first and most vividly as Elaine's three schoolmates, led by the fascinatingly cruel Cordelia. Cordelia convinces Elaine at an early age that no matter what she does, she's doing it wrong:

[5] CAT'S EYE, by *Margaret Atwood*. Doubleday. $18.95.

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Cordelia says, "Think of ten stacks of plates. Those are your ten chances." Every time I do something wrong, a stack of plates comes crashing down. I can see these plates. Cordelia can see them too, because she's the one who says *Crash!*

Elaine, however, does not mold as easily as all that. Her peripatetic life before moving to Toronto (her father was a field researcher who for years moved the family around the forests of Canada) had offered no simple models of traditional role-playing. But her only defence turns out to be escape; she can't conform, so she removes herself—she learns how to faint at will, how to watch herself with an eye as cold and indifferent as a cat's eye marble. What this self-consciousness eventually evolves into, of course, is the cold yet impassioned eye of the visual artist. And Elaine's development as a painter is entirely convincing—her choice of career seems necessary but almost accidental, with no hint of any pretentious inevitability.

Much of the deep enjoyment of reading this novel is watching how the people and objects in Elaine's life later resurface in her work. In fact, I would say that the book's major accomplishment is Atwood's brilliant orchestration of imagery throughout. Images like that cat's eye marble, an old wooden bridge, or an old-fashioned laundry wringer reappear again and again in the novel, often transformed into art or dreams, their resonances ramifying in new contexts. My only complaint with the book is a sense of rushing in its last 150 pages; after dwelling so long on Elaine's childhood, Atwood seems determined to fill in the rest of her life before the book grows too unwieldy. But that's only a cavil; if I were another kind of reviewer, I might even say that *Cat's Eye* is a cause for celebration. My only regret is that, now I've told you about it, you can't have the pleasure of stumbling upon it for yourselves.

Finally, there was a book I literally stumbled upon this quarter—*Indian Nocturne* by Antonio Tabucchi,[6] which my mail carrier left on the floor just inside my vestibule door. Deciding not to allow this unfortunate introduction to prejudice me against the book, I quickly opened the envelope and examined the dust jacket. Tabucchi's was a name I didn't recognize, but the book came by way of New Directions, a small, daring press that can usually be relied on to turn up something interesting from beyond the commercial pale. And so it has again with this 88-page novella, the story of an unnamed narrator's journey through the Indian subcontinent in search of . . . well, a person, an idea, himself—we're never entirely sure. His quarry has a name, Xavier, and a handle of sorts, "a Portuguese who lost his way in India." But it is characteristic of the author's playfully

[6] INDIAN NOCTURNE, by *Antonio Tabucchi*. Trans. by *Tim Parks*. New Directions Books. $19.95.

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mysterious way of telling a story that we never know exactly who Xavier is or why the narrator seeks him. Tabucchi gives us just enough information to feel intrigued without ever being enlightened. And while the book is occasionally a bit too self-consciously lit'rary, this is not one of those exercises in Continental pretension that appear every so often from the other side of the Atlantic. Tabucchi is a funny, fluid writer who manages to deflate his high ideas without sacrificing their validity.

The book takes the form of a series of conversations between the narrator and the various people he finds as he traces Xavier's tortuous path across India. The conversations range from a heavily subtexted discussion about a wine list to a puzzling talk about *atma*, or soul, with a deformed Jain prophet in a remote bus station. What all of these conversations share, however, is a sense of partial understanding that is so common in real-life encounters yet so rare in fiction. These people converse as if playing a game whose rules they are creating as they go along and whose outcome inevitably remains obscure:

> "Practically . . . Actually," he said, "what strange words. I heard them so many times in England, you Europeans often use these words. . . . I have never managed to establish whether out of pessimism or optimism," he went on. "What do you think?"
>
> I asked him if he could explain himself better.
>
> "Oh," he said, "it's difficult to explain more clearly. Yes, sometimes I ask myself if it's a word which indicates arrogance, or whether on the contrary it merely signifies cynicism. And a great deal of fear as well, perhaps. You follow me?"
>
> "I don't know," I said. "It isn't that simple. But perhaps the word 'practically' means practically nothing."
>
> My companion laughed. It was the first time he had laughed. "You are very clever," he said, "you got the better of me and at the same time you proved me right, practically."
>
> I laughed too, and then said at once: "However, in my case it is practically fear."

These conversations are incidental to the narrator's search, and yet they become the substance of the book, which ultimately concerns the incidental, the indirect—something we realize when, as the narrator's goal comes ever closer, it begins to lose its importance for him. The thing searched for is gradually subsumed by the search itself; movement per se becomes more important than movement toward.

Thus the book, in undermining the idea of direction or intentionality, becomes, in my eyes at least, a celebration of the serendipitous. This narrator doesn't find what he's looking for, but he does find what he isn't looking for. Surely there's a saying of Buddha lurking somewhere in there. And a lesson to be learned, perhaps. If so, I won't think about it, and it may just come to me.

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EMILY GROSHOLZ

Hope and Illusion in a Late Age: The Poetics of Yves Bonnefoy

YVES BONNEFOY, OFTEN ACKNOWLEDGED as the greatest postwar French poet, has published five books of poetry which have been translated into English by Galway Kinnell, Richard Pevear and John T. Naughton. Readers of *The Hudson Review* will recognize him as the 1988 recipient of the Bennett Award; he has also been awarded the Prix Montaigne in West Germany and numerous honors in France for his poetry. Over the years, he has established himself as the preeminent translator of Shakespeare into French. Married to an American, Lucie Vine Bonnefoy, he has spent a substantial portion of his life visiting and teaching in the United States, at Yale, Williams, the University of Chicago, Princeton, the University of Oklahoma, and elsewhere. In his critical writings, which are manifold, he has often written about the English literary tradition in relation to that of France. He was elected to the Collège de France in 1981, not only because of his poetry but also for an important body of critical, scholarly and editorial work that ranges from the study of comparative religion to the history of art.

In short, few exponents of contemporary French letters deserve the attention of the reading public in America more than Yves Bonnefoy. Up to this point, however, very little of his prose work has been available in English translation. Finally this year, the University of Chicago Press has published a collection of his literary essays, entitled *The Act and the Place of Poetry* and edited by John T. Naughton.[1] (A collection of his essays on the visual arts is in preparation, edited by Richard Stamelman.) Naughton's selection, from the books *L'Improbable et autres essais*, *Le nuage rouge* and *Entretiens sur la poésie* is on the whole well considered. The essays cover the period 1955–81, and treat many of Bonnefoy's most compelling themes: medieval narrative, the poetry of Shakespeare, Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Rimbaud, the contrasting linguistic and conceptual potentials of French and English, and his abiding metaphysical concern, the relation between the transcendent and the everyday. The essays are arranged in roughly chronological sequence according to subject matter. Unfortunately, this editorial decision sets one of the most recondite and

[1] THE ACT AND THE PLACE OF POETRY: Selected Essays, by *Yves Bonnefoy*, ed. by *John T. Naughton*. University of Chicago Press. $26.95.

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least gracefully translated essays first in the sequence, "Words and Speech in the *Song of Roland*." The conjunction of Bonnefoy's metaphysical analysis and the medieval poem is apt to seem forced and schematic to a reader approaching Bonnefoy's work for the first time. Better to start by reading some of the subsequent essays, for example "Madame Rimbaud," where Bonnefoy treats more culturally accessible poetry and tempers metaphysics with psychology. Then later, oriented to Bonnefoy's approach and vocabulary, one can appreciate the subtlety of his insight into the tragic encounter between Franks and Saracens.

The next three essays in the volume, on Shakespeare, will be particularly fascinating to English-speaking readers. In the first, "Shakespeare and the French Poet," Bonnefoy begins by wondering why Shakespeare has been so badly translated into French. The illustrations he uses to underscore his point are devastatingly apt: for example, the opening of Hamlet's famous soliloquy becomes in Voltaire's translation, "*Demeure, il faut choisir, et passer à l'instant / De la vie à la mort et de l'être au néant . . .*" The obverse of his question is, of course, whether he himself can hope to translate the plays any better. And his answer in this essay, which takes Racine as Shakespeare's foil, is a series of really profound insights into the different possibilities that French and English hold open for the poet. English poetry, Bonnefoy proposes, has an Aristotelian devotion to the realm of things and aims for a continuity with and access to the historical world of human action. French poetry, by contrast, wishes to raise character and plot above the contingent detail of real life, to stake out a "place apart" where Platonic essences can exhibit their congruences and oppositions. English poetry is empirical, subordinate to the external object; French poetry is hieratic, ritualizing, an instrument of orderly reduction. Bonnefoy summarizes the opposition in these terms:

> . . . in English the word is an opening: it is all surface—and in French it is a closing: it is all depth. On the one hand, a kind of word that can call upon all the rest to aid precision and enrichment; and on the other, a vocabulary as reduced as possible, so as to protect a single essential experience. On the one hand, unlimited dissociation, receptiveness to every dialectical or technical possibility, so that an alert awareness can penetrate always further into the phenomenal world. And on the other hand, all these evocations of sense entering into poetry as one enters into an Order, to be completely transformed, dying to the world, becoming one with the Idea the poem continually realizes. English poetry is like a mirror, French poetry like a crystal sphere.

Like any deep and useful distinction, this one invites questioning by counterexample. Shakespeare, as Donald Davie points out, is a great poet whose diction is impure, unchaste, and unclassical. Would the

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contrast between French and English poetry seem so clear if the opposition were set up between Racine and, say, Dryden, whose parsimonious vocabulary and purity of style are just as striking? Indeed, Bonnefoy himself admits that Racine cannot be taken to summarize all of French poetry; Baudelaire, for example, reacted strongly against Racine and strove for an enriched vocabulary and the evocation of particulars. And yet, Bonnefoy observes, Baudelaire did not escape the Platonizing tendency of French. Finally, what mattered to him as a poet was not the fate of the swan or woman whose individual existence he managed to re-create, but rather the dramatic entry of the Idea into the limitation, chance and mortality of the sensible world. This is a curious observation, not easy to reconcile with Bonnefoy's later, repeated claims that Baudelaire's poetry is able to confront the beloved Other, despite the ambivalence and affliction mixed up in his love. In another essay in the book, "Baudelaire Speaks to Mallarmé," he remarks: "Baudelaire's diamond does not glitter on the tiara of some Hérodiade, but on the body of his *très chère*, his beloved Jeanne Duval." And one wonders if Bonnefoy means to apply the same dictum to himself: does the Platonism inherent in the French language coerce him as well, so that poems which seem, for example, to be written to his wife and daughter, two obliquely but vividly evoked presences, prove to be only dramatizations of being? Despite the desire of many of his critics, even one so great as Jean Starobinski, to read him as a poetic metaphysician, it is impossible fully to appreciate Bonnefoy's poems apart from the distinctive landscapes and personal attachments to which they refer.

As the last paragraph indicates, perusal of Bonnefoy's criticism easily raises reflexive questions about his own poetic work, for he writes most convincingly about poets with whom he feels an affinity. The last two essays on Shakespeare are no exception. "Shakespeare's Uneasiness," connecting *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and "Readiness, Ripeness," connecting *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, both reveal essential aspects of Bonnefoy's poetic commitments. The former takes up Shakespeare's treatment of the problem of evil. While the graceful and boyish Romeo might seem oddly paired with Macbeth, Bonnefoy identifies the same canker at the root of their tragedies. The fearful, obsessive Macbeth, presented with all the generosity of Shakespeare's vision, is not demonic but typical of a universal human possibility: constantly deceiving himself, the usurper retreats into self-enclosure, cutting himself off from the wholeness of the created world and human society. But Romeo too displays a negative disposition, a penchant for retreating into illusion and thus failing to assess and engage reality.

> To stake everything on a dream, to bank on the semblance instead of facing the presence, is to involve oneself between reality and mirage in a difficult quandary, where impatience lays down the

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> law, where actions are more risky and where consequently risks are more dangerous, and disaster strikes at last.

The interplay between presence and illusion lies at the heart of Bonnefoy's poetics. Illusions are beautiful, plentiful, cheap, and especially seductive to writers; the gleam of presence remains our sole reliable guide to charity and effective action, but it is heartbreakingly elusive. In our frustration, we often suppose that we have captured and domesticated presence, but presence so confined invariably pales into illusion.

The essay "Readiness, Ripeness" begins by characterizing Hamlet as one of the first victims of the Age of Anxiety. The old Hamlet, the dead king, belonged to an archaic, feudal and Christian, mode of being. His son however is a borderline creature; unable to renounce his adherence to a dying tradition, the younger Hamlet faces a modern world without fixed structure, where truths are only partial and contradictory. His "readiness" therefore can only be a negative strategy for the preservation of the soul in an impoverished age, a schematic hope existing perhaps only at the level of language, held in reserve for some future revelation of a new order. In *King Lear*, by contrast, Bonnefoy finds that the old order remains the uncontested frame of reference, even though the play succeeds *Hamlet* by five or six years. The "ripeness" that at the end of the play redeems Lear and Edgar, and to a certain extent Gloucester and Albany, is not a skeptical, highly individualized suspension of the search for meaning, but a liberation and assurance of order open to any soul. In *Lear*,

> . . . "the center holds", meaning manages to survive and even take on new depth, assuring values, calling forth sacrifice and devotion, allowing for moral integrity, for dignity, and for a relation to oneself that might be termed plenary if not blissful. Here we learn that the structures of meaning are but a bridge of thread thrown over fearful depths; but these threads are made of steel.

In conclusion, Bonnefoy asks whether the ripeness of Lear, as well as the mere readiness of Hamlet, might still be valid for the present age. His answer, revealing the optimism that underlies his own poetics, is affirmative, and rests on a belief that a deep, universal order still remains "in place, in nature and in us." So it is the poet's task not only to remember and to hope, but to make manifest what is already there, a presence hidden by the dissociations and alienations of modern culture.

The next set of essays in the book treats the three great French poets, Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Rimbaud, with whom Bonnefoy, as both poet and critic, has been deeply engaged all his life. "Baudelaire Speaks to Mallarmé" attempts to reconstruct a literary conversation that never actually took place, but which can be inferred from the

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young Mallarmé's portrait of Baudelaire in his *Symphonie littéraire* and from notes Baudelaire made very late in life, published under the title *Pauvre Belgique*. In Mallarmé's naive and one-sided view, Baudelaire is the creator of a barren poetic landscape, nature as a prison devoid of other human presences. In the midst of his exile, the only hope for the "Prince of Dreams" is to conjure up another world of pure forms, among which Beauty reigns supreme. This vision of Baudelaire is quite at odds with Bonnefoy's own understanding, and he uses Baudelaire's prose and poetry as evidence that it cannot be accurate. Again and again, Bonnefoy argues, Baudelaire denounces Ideal Beauty as a dangerous illusion, "Le Masque," the "Rêve parisien" behind which lurks the suffering of a wasted life. Poetry cut off from material reality, time, incarnation, the presence of the Other (typically in Baudelaire's poetry a woman), is morally deficient and futile. Rather, the testimony of *Les Fleurs du Mal* is that the realm of our actions, limited by time and chance, played out on the earth which is our home, is our only reality; and that in the midst of the here and now, we always encounter a partly impenetrable, partly legible order. However elusive that order, we must accept it on its own terms, for any attempt to immortalize and fix it as the Ideal destroys it, as the ruinous enterprises of aesthete and ideologue reveal. Bonnefoy concludes,

> The key to our being, the only path toward wholeness, thus seems to me the acceptance of chance. One might call such acceptance a *sacrifice*, since it implies that the individual should renounce infinite possibilities and choose to venture toward his absolute. One might call it consent to death, since it fixes our eyes on finitude. And one may call it love, for only love with its imperious decisive choices enables us to consent to what has been given us.

Thus Bonnefoy charitably accepts the defeats, illness and sadness of Baudelaire's maturity, seeing them as transmuted not only into great poems but equally into Baudelaire's own charitable acceptance of the conditions of human life.

And this summary of Baudelaire's achievement as a poet, so close to Bonnefoy's own guiding lights, shows where his allegiances lie. Much as Bonnefoy admires Mallarmé and his passage from naive aestheticism to the more complex task of building a house for being in the conditional absolute of speech, he must finally reject that project as also in its own way futile, for Mallarmé can never succeed in ridding his perfect speeches of traces of his own personality and its contingencies. Similarly, in "Paul Valéry," he criticizes that gifted but lesser poet for being "condemned to ideas, to words (to the intelligible part of the word), by a lack of love for things, and deprived of that essential joy mixed with tears which suddenly rescues the poetic work from its night." Speech, Bonnefoy stubbornly insists, has a more than

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idealizing, illusory, merely ludic function. Beginning with words like lamp, ship and shore, bread and fire, language once helped us found a subjectively intelligible world radiating out from the domestic hearth, and we must believe that it still has the power to heal and secure "our involvement in the obscure possibilities of earth, of our relation with what is."

Bonnefoy's optimism must be understood, however, as severely qualified. We are, he admits, threatened not only by the ancient possibility of evil, of the corrupt and violent will, but by the unprecedented dangers of our era, its abstraction, decadence and fragmentation. And the steel threads of genuine poetry or any vision of wholeness plausible in this late age, are after all only threads. The immense difficulty of discovering a modern poetics accounts perhaps for Bonnefoy's recurrent fascination with two of the most difficult characters among the great artists of modernity, Arthur Rimbaud and Alberto Giacometti. (One hopes that Stamelman's collection will include some of Bonnefoy's searching essays on the latter.) Both men combine a tormented psychology, competent enough to seek love but disabled enough continually to thwart that seeking, with creative powers of the highest order. Bonnefoy takes them both as, in Susan Sontag's phrase, exemplary sufferers, and searches for clues to the shape of their tangled lives as if such discoveries could help us understand our common condition, so much hope knotted in so much trouble.

The lives of Rimbaud and Giacometti share another feature: they were raised by strong, indeed sometimes fierce, mothers with whom they never managed to come to terms as adults. In his earlier study, *Rimbaud par lui-même* (unfortunately available only in a very awkward English translation), Bonnefoy characterizes Rimbaud's mother as bigoted, morbid and cold, responsible in a fairly straightforward way for her son's neuroses. In the later essay "Madame Rimbaud" chosen by Naughton, Bonnefoy amends his earlier judgment, and speculates on more positive elements in her character and in Rimbaud's relation to her. Vitalie Cuif's letters reveal a timid, romantic girl who, abandoned early on by her husband, felt bound to be a father to her children; girlish warmth became tyranny, and the playfulness of a young mother was dispersed in her anxious safeguarding of an always uncertain bourgeois respectability. The resulting view of fatherless family life in a provincial French town is more complex and generous, and so yields a more adequate explanation of why Rimbaud became, not just a conflictful adult but an uncompromising, active, prophetic poet whose nostalgia for *les années enfantes* fed his inspiring protests against a social orthodoxy that had forgotten its own reasons for existing. And Bonnefoy's close reading of Rimbaud's poetry is exemplary; he weaves a scholar's patient attention to textual dating and detail in and out of a highly nuanced, undogmatic but essentially Freudian account of Rimbaud's psyche, rendered more universal by a

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further interlacing of metaphysical analysis. Thus Bonnefoy praises Rimbaud as the higher type of poetic mind, one not satisfied with the beautiful, completed form of the poem, but rather,

> . . . the spirit that reaches its ultimate transparency through the dispersal of the illusions of the personal unconscious. Such minds indeed accept poetic form, if only as a mirror by means of which they may supervise their otherwise invisible research; but they are aware of the great danger it presents, and their first task is to reject its potential orthodoxy and thus to move on from one attempt to another in what is, finally, not the construction of a work but the truth of a destiny . . . They do not believe in the poem, that aftermath of poetry, but they accept it and even choose it, since here alone can the human sign recognize its alienation and recover wholeness, provided, of course, that some aspiration uplifts it.

The final set of essays in *The Act and the Place of Poetry* are a half dozen statements and restatements written between 1959 and 1981 of Bonnefoy's belief in the possibility of poetry. In the essay "Image and Presence" which was his inaugural address to the Collège de France in 1981, Bonnefoy casts a surprising perspective on his position by locating it in the context of contemporary French literary theory, particularly the work of Roland Barthes, whose chair he was assuming. As a thinker he understands and appreciates the attempt of Saussure, Barthes and Derrida *inter alia* to make us see how vexed our relation to language must be in this era where the Word is no longer a gift of the gods but a human instrument of social construction. As a poet, however, he rejects the skeptical inference all too often drawn from such theorizing, that poetry which embodies a genuine harmony, subjectivity based on candid love, community capable of constructive action, are things of the past or, if revived as ideals, dangerous illusions. Rather, Bonnefoy argues, the revelations of the critics can have a positive function in the development that he hopes for. The really dangerous illusions of self-possession and formalizable completeness, the cult of excarnated ideas that seems to be the legacy of scientific Cartesianism, have in fact been weakened by those critics and their unrelenting assault on the dogmas surrounding our capacity to know. But poets, who cannot deny their experience of the transcendent nor the urgency of the concrete situations, personal and civic, in which we find ourselves, also cannot deny the imperatives of a realizable harmony. The poet's task is then to put the rich but negative discoveries of critical theory in the service of a new song, a new revelation of presence. And at its best, Bonnefoy suggests, this project can even surpass its own negative and critical animus, circling back to embrace the all too human tendency to be seduced by illusions.

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> What dream opposes to life, what the analysts of the text study only to dissolve into the indifference of signs, what a more superficial poetry would have torn up with rage, even if perishing with its victim, poetry can refute but listen to, can condemn while absolving it of its fault; can reintegrate it, clarified, into the unity of life.

Given the predispositions of our cultures and languages, the growing American audience for Yves Bonnefoy's poetry and prose may wish from time to time that he temper his Gallic abstractions with greater historical concreteness. How does his work relate to the course of his own life as lover, husband and father? How have his intellectual friendships impinged on the development of his thought about illusion and presence? How does his vision of moral integrity bear on the colonial and racial difficulties France has faced in the past forty years, or the depredations of the rural French countryside, of the Dordogne, the Basses Alpes, Provence, whose threatened beauty haunts so many of his poems? These issues are often submerged in his philosophical prose. All the same, the writing of Yves Bonnefoy is an important lighthouse on the contemporary cultural coastline, and this well-chosen and competently translated collection of essays offers us a good opportunity to reckon with it in English.

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ANDREW HUDGINS

Poetry Chronicle

BROOKS HAXTON IS A POET WHO, RARE THESE DAYS, loves the *tour de force*—a poet who repeatedly tests his skill against difficult formal challenges in both metrical and free verse. His first book, *The Lay of Eleanor and Irene*, is an interesting but ultimately unsuccessful attempt to adapt the medieval French lay to a modern Manhattan setting. *Dominion*, his second book, begins with an inventive and wholly charming mock-epic about doing battle with a snake in a chicken coop. And according to the latest catalogue from Story Line Press, Haxton will soon publish *Dead Reckoning*, a novel in verse. As if to assert the author's versatility, *Traveling Company*,[1] his current collection of poems, begins with epistolary poems and ends with "Variations on the *Tao Te Ching*" and "*Horae Paganicae*," the latter a poem primarily in free verse couplets that uses the structure of the canonical hours to celebrate passionately and vividly not the spiritual, but the physical, world. In between, there are sonnets, blank verse, short narratives, and an exhilarating and humorous poem called "Dithyramb" about the poet at eleven years old, trying to sleep, while on the other side of his bedroom wall his father played in a "*miraculously* bad" orchestra made up of twenty-nine music-loving neighbors. Suddenly and movingly the poem reveals itself to be a statement on poetry when the poet says to his father that "such racket" provides "the unlikeliest of comforts" to those who call on St. Cecilia, "as in my misguided tenor / in good faith I do / for that I am your son." There are also a couple of poems that are basically extended and tedious elaborations on the words that serve as their titles: "Canon" and "Wingnut." The latter begins: "The winged fastener! / The flightless nut! / The featherless and nutless one!" And it goes on like this, like a giddy Swinburne, for five pages. Such risky failures, though, are the price Haxton has to pay for his equally ambitious successes.

Haxton, it seems to me, employs three levels of rhetoric. The highest—and least satisfying—is the high-flown, ecstatic invention of "Wingnut"; it's a voice that I find either frivolous or overwrought. It is also a voice he rarely uses in *Traveling Company*. The opposite extreme is the subdued rhetoric of contemporary prose that Haxton uses in his sonnets and some blank verse. In these poems the writing sometimes runs curiously flat, as if he expects the rhyme and meter

[1] TRAVELING COMPANY, by *Brooks Haxton*. Alfred A. Knopf. $18.95.

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will substitute for charged language. The blank verse is consistently better than the sonnets because it rises to a slightly higher pitch of rhetorical urgency. The middle level is where Haxton works best and it is the level of most of the poems in *Traveling Company*. The voice is passionate without being portentous, and urgent without being shrill. It is a pleasantly muted version of the Southern high rhetorical tradition that extends from Poe and Lanier, through some of the Fugitives, and on to Robert Penn Warren, James Dickey, and beyond. One of the roots of this language goes back to the Southern pulpit, something Haxton implicitly acknowledges in "The Wind," which uses as its epigraph John 3:8 ("The wind bloweth where it listeth . . ."). The poet tells of his maternal grandfather, who tried by the lights of his day to live a godly life. Unfairly, the old man's faith is rewarded by a stroke that gives him an unpleasant death and that fact is not lost on one of the servants, who later preaches a sermon that seems to be a commentary on the arbitrariness of fate:

> Bright blood overfilled the mouth and nostrils.
> Frank, the man who watched this, was the old man's driver, nurse, and friend; his people knew him as The Preacher.
> Nine years passed; Frank left his congregation in the country; and in town he preached once from John, Chapter 3, Verse 8, as follows:
> Old people in the country say, you suck a cow's tit, you can see the wind.
> Well. One old woman. She did suck a cow's tit. And she seen the wind. And it was blue.

And here is a similar building up of a propulsive rhetoric used for lyric, rather than narrative, purposes, as the poet addresses, in "Auspice," friends who have, or soon will have a new baby:

> when the one who has no thought of it this winter
> sprawled on a blanket over the earth between you
> under a splash of greenwood shade
> shall creep and chortle
> into the warm splashed sunlight
> when the sumacs have caught wind of autumn
> first-to-turn again
> that what can be begins
> and keeps beginning.

Traveling Company contains a number of poems as fine as "The Wind" and "Auspice," and they are, it seems to me, as fine as anything written in their mode since Robert Penn Warren and James Dickey were writing their best work.

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Edward Hirsch's poems have always walked the line between sentiment and sentimentality. In *The Night Parade*,[2] though, the poems too often stray over the line into the self-indulgences of sentimentality. But that is not to say the book does not contain work as emotionally charged and finely wrought as the best of Hirsch's earlier poetry. It does. And at his best, Hirsch seizes powerfully on a subject and gives strong and difficult emotions their honest due while keeping an unwavering eye on the larger context in which those emotions exist. Among the successes in *The Night Parade* are "Execution," about the death by cancer of his high school football coach; "American Apocalypse," about the great Chicago fire; and "The Abortion (1969)," about an unnecessary illegal abortion performed by a dishonest doctor. However, in the poems about his family, poems that constitute more than one-third of the book, he is so close to the people he writes about that he overwhelms them, as literary subjects, with his love. As a result, the reader often feels like an intruder in the world of the poems, rather than an invited guest. Indeed, reading the poems, I occasionally felt awkward and embarrassed, like a stranger at a funeral, a stranger who, in the emotional upheaval of the moment, has not been introduced to the family and so is surrounded by sketchy stories, and by passionate and tender outbursts that he cannot share.

The first person dominates these poems, and the "I" does not stand back enough to let full light fall on the ostensible subjects. The result is less "My uncle's death means this" and more "My uncle's death means this *to me*." The problem is implicit in the titles of some of the poems ("My Grandfather's Bed," "My Grandfather's Poems," "My Father's Back") and explicit in their execution. Here is a passage from "Memorandums," the first poem in the book and one that stands as a sort of *ars poetica* for the volume:

> I put down these memorandums of my affections
> In honor of my mother
> And my mother's mother who cooled
> My forehead with a damp washcloth,
> My two sisters and the aunt
> Who ministered to my headaches in childhood,
>
> My grandfather who kissed me on the upper arm
> And tucked me in
> At night, my father who touched
> The blanket in the morning, gently.

Hirsch is admirable in that he goes right at feelings that are difficult to write about: honest affection, deep love, profound sentiment. The

[2] THE NIGHT PARADE, by *Edward Hirsch*. Alfred A. Knopf. $9.95p.

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problem is not narcissism; rather, it is too much emotion, not enough reflection in tranquillity. The lack of aesthetic reflection shows up in the attenuated syntax, which piles up clauses and phrases, especially prepositional phrases, at the ends of lines and sentences. Something happened *at* such a place, *at* such a time, *in* such a manner, *before this* and *after* that. This is not padding, but a search for precision of detail that could have been more smoothly and powerfully integrated into the sentences if Hirsch had thoroughly assimilated his material not as subject matter but as aesthetic object. Notice the wistful and inconclusive trailing off of this quotation from "Family Stories":

> I remember how my mother brought the dress
> My grandmother would have worn to my wedding
> To show her in the hospital. All that's over now.
>
> But tonight when I closed my eyes for a moment
> I imagined my unborn daughter and her small son
> Pausing in the rain on an empty bridge.

His family obviously means a great deal to Hirsch, and understandably so, but his attempts, by pure assertion, to get them to mean something to us result in strained, unconvincing writing. The near litany of family names in "Family Stories" is talismanic and resonant to Hirsch; for the reader, the names remain merely names—and the emotions, though stated, remain unevoked and, therefore, sentimental:

> The night that Ida's husband was murdered
> Locking up his grocery store in Irving Park,
> The winter of mourning that she lived with them,
>
> The trips across the country for the births
> Of Roselyn and Sherwood and Larry, the familial
> Poloposis that eventually killed Max . . .

Criticizing a poet for sentimentality is often to praise the author for his excesses of affection—something good in a friend, but bad in his writing. Edward Hirsch has been and remains a fine poet. These detours into sentimentality and attenuated writing will prove, I hope, to be no more than detours.

The opposite of sentimentality is frigidity, and if Edward Hirsch occasionally loves his material without enough aesthetic distance or intellectual perspective, Norman Dubie often seems to have little emotional investment in what he writes. It is always clear why Hirsch

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writes about his family, but it is seldom clear in *Groom Falconer*[3] why Dubie chooses to write about, or from the point of view of, Trakl, Poe, Chagall, a race car driver, a clergyman's daughter. With Richard Howard, Robert Browning, or for that matter, Geoffrey Chaucer, a reader feels the writer's love, hate, or ambivalences for his mask. There is a sense of involvement with the chosen speaker. Indeed, that sense of passionate involvement with a literary figure shows through the clotted language and intellectual convolutions of Dubie's early book *Alehouse Sonnets* (addressed to William Hazlitt), which owes many of its virtues and defects to Berryman's *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet.* But in *Groom Falconer*, Dubie writes about his characters with such imagistic purity, with such an icy refusal to penetrate the surface of their actions and appearances, that they seem to exist for no other reason than to provide their creator with vivid images.

One of the masters behind Dubie's fondness for brilliant, exotic imagery seems to be Wallace Stevens, whose imagery and phrasing are evident in "Buffalo Clouds over the Maestro Hoon," an allusion to Stevens' "Tea at the Palace of Hoon." When Dubie dons Stevens' style, he also dons some of his ideas, and the result is a sharply focused, penetrating and even witty analysis of the purposes of art. Like the Maestro's tightrope walk over Niagara Falls "while pushing a wheelbarrow / That contained a lion captured in the Congo," art is "a useless thing to do in the morning. / And a glory": "The only beauty / In the story is that the lion roared. His voice / Twice lost to the deafening falls; of course, / It was reported that the lion yawned." Another, even better, poem about art is "Of politics, & Art." In this touching and quite wonderful poem, Dubie forcefully refutes a woman who implies that *Moby Dick* will not survive as a great book because it does not contain women. He remembers sitting, snowbound in a classroom, while the teacher, who was dying of tuberculosis, read to the class the passage from the novel in which the sailors drift into a herd of whales in which the females are nursing their young:

> The cold frightened whales
> Just stared into what they allowed
> Was the ecstatic lapidary pond of a nursing cow's
> One visible eyeball.
> And they were at peace with themselves.

Similarly the frightened children are calmed by the reading of their teacher:

> Sometimes a whole civilization can be dying
> Peacefully in one young woman, in a small heated room

[3] GROOM FALCONER, by *Norman Dubie*. W. W. Norton. $17.95.

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With thirty children
Rapt, confident and listening to the pure
God rendering voice of a storm.

These are very fine poems. But they are exceptions to Dubie's general practice in *Groom Falconer* of presenting a glittering image and letting it stand as its own explanation or, worse, of making some inconclusive and unconvincing gesture toward commenting on it. Even the poems ostensibly about the writer's life suffer from this problem, as if his own life had passed directly into aesthetic material without first having been fully felt.

The first poem in *Groom Falconer* is called "Ars Poetica." In the poem, the poet remembers a time thirty years ago when he sat on the bench with his mother and sister and saw a "red-haired girl" who is missing her left thumb:

Breathless, she asks for a light:
A crumpled pack of Lucky Strikes
At the top of a nylon stocking;
The other leg bare, her abdomen
And breasts plastered with white sand.

The girl is also, the poet tells us, drunk. At the end of the poem, Dubie returns to the woman and offers a scant, coy gesture toward commenting on why he has remembered her:

She frightened my mother and me. My little
Sister just thought she was funny.
In thirty years I have dreamt of her twice, once
With fear and once without. I've written
This for her, and because

Twice is too often
Considering how beautiful she was.

Huh? The poem subverts our expectation that the poet will say "Twice is not enough / Considering how beautiful she was," but to what purpose? Is the implication that only the ugly should be remembered? Or that beauty is naturally forgotten and the unpleasant naturally remembered? Or that time can transform the ugly into the beautiful? If so, what does that tell us about the speaker? Of the nature of beauty? Or of perception itself? The woman is certainly not presented as beautiful to start with, so what has caused the speaker's perception to change? And what does he find beautiful about her? Portentously, the poem gestures toward meaning but evades saying anything. It simulates the discursive moves a poem makes, but in its emotional frigidity it commits itself to none of them. And unfortu-

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nately the poem fulfills the promise of its title: it really does serve as an *ars poetica* for most of the poems in *Groom Falconer*—poems in which Dubie, with a fine eye, loots literature, culture, and his own life for vivid images out of which he constructs poetry that only infrequently undertakes the hard work of forming a poem.

Adrienne Rich is at her very powerful best as a poet when she admits doubt, when she questions both herself and others, but she is at her worst—wooden, prosaic, Procrustean—when she has all the answers. Her best writing was during the time just before and after *Diving into the Wreck,* when she was making the transition from metrical verse to free verse, a time when she was challenging her previous conceptions of form and subject. The poems of that time are searingly honest, sinewy, and charged by a searching, rigorous mind. But as successful revolutions ossify into the establishment for the next generation, Adrienne Rich the iconoclast has become an icon, and she has seized the privileges of an icon. As readers, the burden is now on us to understand not just literary allusions but Rich's casual first-name references to her friends. And all too often she writes as if we had gathered at her feet to await her pronouncements on how to think properly. In about half the poems in *Time's Power: Poems 1985–1988*[4] the result is stultifying. In these poems Rich struggles to be not just politically correct but inclusively politically correct, unwilling to let any just cause do without her services as a spokeswoman. "Walking Down the Road" contains these lines:

> the Baja streams out like lava-melt
> we are no longer the United States
> we're a lost piece of Mexico
> maybe dreaming the destruction
> of the Indians, reading the headlines,
> how the gringos marched into Mexico City
> forcing California into the hand
> of Manifest Destiny, law following greed.

Three lines later, the poem arrives at this insight: "One thing follows on another, that is time." One thinks of Gilda Radner's mocking this type of portentous pretension on the old "Saturday Night Live": "It's always something. If it isn't one thing, it's another."

But *Time's Power* comes back time and again to meditations on death, and death is the one thing that few people can face and remain utterly certain of their lives and convictions. One of these meditations, "Sleepwalking Next to Death," is a total failure. It has a dashed-off surreal quality that is meant, I suppose, to be charming but ends up merely being silly. Perhaps that is due to the recurrent snail imagery:

[4] TIME'S POWER: Poems 1985–1988, by *Adrienne Rich.* W. W. Norton. $15.95; $7.95.

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"This snail could have dreamed it was a painter or a poet / This snail could have driven fast at night / putting up graffiti with a spray-gun: // This snail could have ridden / in the back of the pick-up, handling guns." The unfortunate snail imagery returns at the end of the poem, where it is given a sentimental twist:

> Promise you won't jump the train
> vanish into the bus depot at three a.m.
> that you won't defect
> that we'll travel
> like two snails
> our four horns erect

To my mind, Rich's greatest artistic triumph has been the consummate skill with which she can control different free verse rhythms, and that skill is evident in "Dreamwood," "Living Memory," and "Turning," each a deeply moving meditation on death and the power of time both to destroy and heal. In this passage from "Living Memory" she builds an oracular profundity from the repetition of the word "living" and the adroit varying of its position in the line:

> All we can read is life. Death is invisible.
> A yahrzeit candle belongs
> to life. The sugar skulls
> eaten on graves for the Day of the Dead
> belong to life. To the living. The Kaddish is to the living,
> the Day of the Dead, for the living. Only the living
> invent these plumes, tombs, mounds, funeral ships,
> living hands turn the mirrors to the walls,
> tear the boughs of yew to lay on the casket,
> rip the clothes of mourning. Only the living
> decide death's color: is it white or black?
> The granite bulkhead
> incised with names, the quilt of names, were made
> by the living, for the living.

There is nothing new in the ideas here, only in the expression that gives them new life, new emotional force. There will be a long literary battle over what Rich's great work is, but I will cast my vote now for the lyrical poems, such as this one, that step beyond contemporary political concerns without denying them—poems in which the artist stands on the shoulders of the ideologue. But in *Time's Power* the ideologue is all too frequently standing on the shoulders of the artist.

If Philip Larkin isn't quite the equal of his masters—Yeats, Hardy, Auden—he's more likeable than any of them. And that's a puzzling feat given the pretty much unrelieved pessimism of Larkin's outlook. But he is able to be misanthropic without being a misanthrope.

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Something in his manner undercuts the message and makes it—and him—palatable to those of us less austere in our pessimism than he is. Unlike the true misanthrope who takes an ungodly relish in misfortune, Larkin always seems sorrowful, though not surprised, at its inevitability. But the deepest undercutting of his pessimism comes from Larkin's poetic skill: *joie de vivre* shines through in the sensual play of sentences through meter and rhyme. A loose analogy might be the fairly common experience of humming along to a cheerful tune on the radio and suddenly realizing it is a song of heartbreak, desolation, and loss. In delivering this paradigmatic mixed message and in accommodating conversational speech to formal metric, Larkin stands alone in our century. Sheer pleasure in language shines throughout "Vers de Société," which begins:

> *My wife and I have asked a crowd of craps*
> *To come and waste their time and ours: perhaps*
> *You'd care to join us?* In a pig's arse, friend.
> Day comes to an end.
> The gas fire breathes, the trees are darkly swayed.
> And so *Dear Warlock-Williams: I'm afraid—*

By the final stanza, though, the speaker comes to understand why people go to such parties, though whether he himself accepts the invitation is left in doubt:

> Only the young can be alone freely.
> The time is shorter now for company,
> And sitting by a lamp more often brings
> Not peace, but other things.
> Beyond the light stand failure and remorse
> Whispering *Dear Warlock-Williams: Why, of course—*

Beyond the melancholy of the message there is, in the background, a poet delighting in the reversal that leads from "In a pig's arse, friend" to "*Dear Warlock-Williams: Why, of course.*"

Philip Larkin's *Collected Poems*[5] is not a crucial purchase for anyone who owns the poet's last three books: *The Less Deceived* (1955), *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964), and *High Windows* (1974). They contain all the great poems and, indeed, all the important ones. It is tempting, then, to say that Larkin commented on this *Collected Poems* in 1963 when he wrote "Dockery and Son." In the poem, a man speaks of a schoolmate, Dockery, who has a son in school while he, the speaker, remains childless: "how / Convinced he was he should be added to! / Why did he think adding meant increase? / To me it was dilution." Tempting, but not entirely true. While it contains no new

[5] COLLECTED POEMS, by *Philip Larkin.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $22.50.

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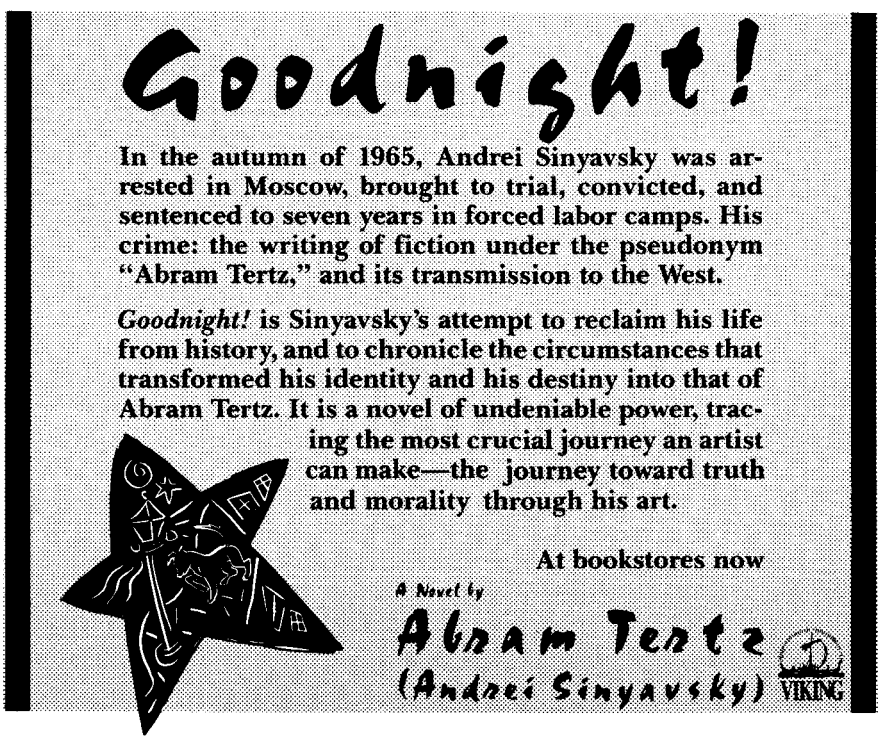
artistic successes, his *Collected Poems* gathers the whole of Larkin's poetic *oeuvre* into one compact volume that is scrupulously, intelligently, and unobtrusively edited. And the edition very clearly reveals Larkin's development as he outgrows an early fascination with Yeats's diction and rhythms, and takes Hardy as his great master, but a Hardy who writes with the supple facility of Auden. Hardy knew his pessimism cut against the grain of his age and he reveled in it. In many of his poems, Hardy takes a certain triumph as he effects a pessimistic reversal in the last stanza or takes a perverse glee as he piles unhappiness on misfortune on top of misery throughout the poem. But Larkin, starting where Hardy stopped, takes his weary pessimism to be the agreed mood of his age. He looks us in the eye as if to say with a sorrowful shrug, "Isn't that the way the world is?" And so beautifully is the melancholy song sung, we agree before we entirely know what we are agreeing to.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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Sound and Fury

THIS IS THE SEASON OF THE HEAVY BIOGRAPHY, three of which have recently landed on my desk. First there was Norman Sherry on Graham Greene at 783 pages (which took Greene only up to age thirty-five); then there was John Paul Russo on I. A. Richards at 843 pages; now, easily topping them all, there is Frederick Karl on William Faulkner at 1131 pages.[1] Mr. Karl is no stranger to the mammoth biography, having already weighed in with 1008 pages on Joseph Conrad. In fact everything Karl does is giant-sized: you would think that his work on Faulkner during the past decade would have been enough to have kept him wholly occupied; but during that time he also published two large works on modern fiction, one of them (*American Fictions: 1940–1982*) a 636 double-columned survey of the field. Not only has he read all the novels but all the criticism as well, and he takes pains to tell us what every novel says and what he thinks about it. At no point, seemingly, has he entertained a question about the worth of all this activity. Conrad and Faulkner and American Fictions are indisputably there, like Everest, and the only thing to do after you read them is to write about them—and at length.

It is not clear that Faulkner is in need of such treatment, since Joseph Blotner has already provided us with a massive two-volume work in 1974 which, while it didn't shed much critical light on Faulkner's art, appears to be thoroughly reliable about his life. Karl gets Blotner out of the way in a Foreword by saying that he is not attempting to replace his predecessor's "monumental" biography; rather he will integrate Faulkner's life and work in the attempt "to understand and interpret that life psychologically, emotionally, and literarily." "Psychologically, emotionally, and literarily"—already the language gives us pause, since it suggests a writer who is not averse to slinging words around and seeing where they land. "This study is in the deepest sense a biography," Karl intones reverentially, and that note, struck at the outset of the long journey to come, is a keynote. Faulkner's imagination, he tells us accurately at one point in the journey, was "in thrall of something he could not quite control" and operated characteristically "through looping, overlapping, and repeated telling." As if in sympathetic thrall to Faulkner, Karl tells and retells the same tale about him: in Robert Graves's words, "There is one story and one story only."

[1] WILLIAM FAULKNER: American Writer, by *Frederick Karl*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson. $37.50.

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Repeatedly we are invited to "understand" Faulkner—certainly Faulkner as a young man—as essentially a poser. High school drop-out, he served briefly in the Royal Air Force in Canada, about which experience (he saw no wartime action) he made up many fanciful tales and came back to Oxford, Mississippi, cultivating a limp. At twenty-three he looked to be, in Karl's words, "without bearing" and was referred to by some members of the community as "Count no 'Count":

> His appearance, pathetic and hostile in its implications, was less that of a down-and-out poet than of a bum or jerk. Worn clothing, stuffing coming from seams, mismatched shoes and socks, and a tongue thickened by liquor—he seemed to be sinking into a manhood which would horrify not only his family but Oxford.

Doubtless a chilling sight, but we know things will come out all right and that the Count will become a Great American Writer rather than a jerk or bum. As for the tongue thickened by liquor, we won't be hearing the last of it, since this was a life drenched in booze. When in his later years Faulkner was asked—by the polite, courteous Japanese students at Nagano—about his drinking, he replied that drinking was "a normal instinct, not a hobby . . . a normal and healthy instinct." The discreet Japanese let it drop there.

But the biographer can't let it drop, since he sees Faulkner's drinking as a key element in the young man's attempt to compensate for his short stature by engaging in masculine pursuits like flying, horsemanship, and hunting, washed down with lots of scotch and bourbon.[2] Liquor, in Karl's words, "was a legal means by which he could achieve manhood and self-destruct at the same time." Drinking was "part of some grand mystery: at the crossroads of the obsession to create and the compulsion to self-destruct." Well put, and perhaps that's all there is to say about it. But no, we must be continually reminded that Faulkner "was interested mainly, in having a good time, drinking"; that "With all, he practiced drinking and driving at the same time"; that (in Horatio Alger-like language to describe a lout) his tongue was "thickened by liquor"; that "he was the town eccentric with a penchant for liquor"; and that "he drank heavily with the scouts" (Faulkner at one point became a scoutmaster!). These are but five of myriad references to drink: Karl serves up all the items previously encountered in Blotner, about Faulkner passing out against the hot radiator in his New York hotel room and seriously burning himself, or about his periodically being taken to this or that clinic for drying-out. It soon becomes possible to follow these accounts and remain completely untouched by them. At one point Karl

[2] At five feet five, Faulkner was not an extreme shortie like Pope or Keats, but shorter than his father and his brothers.

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hazards the guess that "it may some day be possible to connect Faulkner's long, almost undisciplined sentences to the fact that he started drinking early in the morning as he wrote." This utterly reasonable connection was one I myself made some years ago. But the really interesting question raised by Karl's speaking of Faulkner's "almost undisciplined sentences" is whether those sentences are *really* disciplined—"almost" (but not quite, not in fact) undisciplined. Such an inquiry would involve putting harder questions to Faulkner's style than this biographer wants to put.

Karl's solemn earnestness in dealing with his shifty subject, some of whose utterances one might term almost undisciplined, becomes most awkward when he tries to come to terms with Faulkner and race. We all know that kids say the darnedest things, and so did Faulkner on the subject of The Negro. He once wrote his Random House editor that his agent, Harold Ober, "has four stories about niggers." Such language is, to say the least, embarrassing to Karl, who begins to fidget and try to understand why Faulkner would write to Robert Hass ("a Northerner, a Jew") and use such a word. "Was it out-and-out racism"? After all we know, don't we, that "he consciously meant well for Negroes." Or was it "merely the baggage of childhood" "ingrained into the white Mississippian's vocabulary"? How could a man "so alert to language and to nuances" not know what he was doing? Karl penetrates, so he thinks, to "its deepest levels" and finds that the word "indicates a racism so unconsciously insistent" that it becomes a force in Faulkner's judgments. However we analyze it, Karl concludes, it is "disquieting."

Yet it seems downright mild compared to the evening Faulkner spent at the Institute for Advanced Studies, at Princeton, surrounded by august presences. One of the august, J. Robert Oppenheimer, told Faulkner that he'd recently seen one of his stories dramatized on television. Faulkner's response to Oppenheimer was "Television is for niggers." Consternation for Karl. *How* could Faulkner have said that when, the biographer notes, he himself enjoyed watching certain television sports events and comedy shows? Maybe he was pushed to the wall, not feeling well? It never occurs to Karl that Faulkner had a streak of mischievous cruelty in him, and that the nastiest, most mischievous remark he could make to the high-minded scientist was the unanswerable one he made.[3]

[3] Maybe Faulkner made the remark because he was that irresponsible sort of human being, the artist. Consider the following exchange, from *The Sound and the Fury*, between Jason Compson and an unnamed salesman:

> "And what for? so a bunch of damn eastern jews, I'm not talking about men of the jewish religion," I says, "I've known some jews that were fine citizens. You might be one yourself," I says.
>
> "No," he says, "I'm an American."
>
> "No offense," I says. "I give every man his due, regardless of religion or anything else. I have nothing against jews as an individual," I says. "It's just the race."

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Perhaps Faulkner's most notorious bit of racism was provoked by an English journalist, Russell Howe, whose interview with the novelist elicited these words: "But if it came to fighting I'd fight for Mississippi against the United States, even if it meant going out into the street and shooting Negroes. After all, I'm not going out to shoot Mississippians." The only way Karl can deal with this horror is to create a "context which, while it could not excuse the comment, would make it seem less like the ravings of a white Mississippian." So, looking around for a handy context, he settles for booze: "It is possible that Faulkner had been drinking heavily . . . was out of his mind with anguish and alcohol." A paragraph or so later, Karl has taken the bit between his teeth: "We must conjecture that Faulkner was drunk, provoked, at the end of his tether, and Howe pushed him over the edge." This seems to me the last refuge of a biographer—to pretend, in the face of an "impossible" remark (Great Artists don't say Such Things) that there are, somehow, circumstances which "explain" it, like the possibility that Faulkner had been drinking heavily. But since Faulkner was always drinking heavily (except when drying out) how does that fact distinguish the interview with Howe from other episodes in his life? And why on earth, given that we are now at page 932 of the biography, should a reader care one way or the other?

The wasteful repetitiveness that makes Karl's book such a trial to read is felt in the way each point, after it is made, has then to be remade and made yet again. On page 151 we are told—about a "semiautobiographical" novel titled "Elmer" which Faulkner worked on in the 1920s—that its hero, a painter, liked to fondle his tubes of paint "caressing them [in Karl's words], feeling their weight, letting them dangle from his hands in their heaviness, and feeling the swell of the tubes as paint exerts pressure to escape." Karl then remarks that the language carries "insistent images of masturbation," a reasonable enough observation. At the bottom of the same page he refers again to "the fondling of the tubes, with their troubling sexuality." Eight or so pages later, we are told that "Elmer" is full of Freudian images: "To begin with, there is his horror at the color red, signifying fear of the vagina; his fondling of paint tubes, so that touch, color, and shape connect his yearning for art with masturbatory sexuality." Nine pages after that we hear that "Elmer's fear of red also suggests a rejection of the female, since red is associated with the vagina," and that "Elmer's trauma with red is transferred, in part, to his love of paint tubes—fat, bulging, erectile tubes, phallic in design and in his pleasure at stroking them." Two pages later there is one more reference "To the infatuation with paint tubes, fear of red, and other obsessions." This is ludicrous. It is as if Karl forgot to listen to himself (did he have an editor?), and the solemn retailing of such dreary "facts" about an abortive piece of Faulkner's work is unfortunately consistent with the book's general sprawl—its lack of ironic edge and pointedness.

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Unlike some biographers, Karl does not shirk the task of criticizing his subject's art, indeed spends many pages of commentary on each novel and poem and story right down to the most trivial one: " 'Dull Tale' unfortunately fulfills the promise of its title. It has biographical interest and little else. That Faulkner decided not to publish it in his *Collected Stories* was wise." (Wouldn't it have been just as wise, then, for his biographer to ignore it?) But in fact Karl doesn't so much criticize Faulkner's art as enumerate plots, compare characters one to another, and enunciate "themes" in a manner like the following:

> Holding together the work of this period, then, is a deep concern with ultimate questions. How does the individual handle his own needs in the face of an adversarial destiny? How does a person deal with present life when impingement of history and pastness burdens him at every stage? How does one respond to internal needs which defy social constrictions, which break taboos? Further, how does the individual deal with illuminations (from within) when darkness (from without) seems the dominant shade?

I give up! says the reader: *You* marry Mary Jane. Surely this sort of "ultimate" questioning has little or nothing to do with the excitements and pleasures of reading Faulkner. Karl likes to speak of Faulkner's "thinking" on various issues (race, sex, etc.) as if we were to respect him as a philosopher, and at one point even finds that he "reveals a startling linkage to Nietzschean ideas." Or could it be that he had just been drinking heavily?

At any rate, under the stimulus of Karl's biography I have been rereading Faulkner. It seems to me possible that—to use his own lofty language from the Nobel Prize speech—the parts of his work that will not only "endure" but "prevail" may well be the comic parts: like the Jason section in *Sound and the Fury*; or the "Old Man" chapters from *The Wild Palms*; or "Spotted Horses" and other tall tales from *The Hamlet*. Rereading *Sanctuary* I found myself quite disinclined to take André Malraux's line about how it's really a Greek Tragedy superimposed on a detective story, and I often had a devil of a time figuring out what was happening, exactly, in the narrative (Karl refers to the writing in *Sanctuary* as "aslant," but it sometimes feels simply askew). But the two undeniable gems in the book are comic ones: the sojourn of Virgil Snopes and Fonzo—under the impression they are staying in a rooming house—at Miss Reba's Memphis brothel; and the wonderful conversation, conducted with much drinking of beer and gin, between Miss Reba and her friends, Miss Lorraine and Miss Myrtle. (There is the bonus of Uncle Bud, "a small bullet-headed boy of five or six" who accompanies the ladies and keeps sneaking gulps of the currently available beverage, provoking Miss Myrtle to tell him that she is "ashamed to be seen on the street with a drunk boy like you.") Not surprisingly, Karl's reverential tone toward Faulkner doesn't accommodate to viewing him as a comedian.

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Perhaps it is *Light in August* that more than any other of his books separates those who regard him this side idolatry from those, like myself, who are more wary. Karl is either unaware or disdainful of Wyndham Lewis' chapter on Faulkner in *Men Without Art* (1934) which contains some salutary reservations about the novelist's more fevered rhetoric. Lewis quotes the following sentence from *Light in August*—"Now it was still, quiet, the fecund earth now coolly suspirant"—and says that "every time it occurs (every half dozen pages that is) it puts me off (I become 'coolly suspirant' myself)." Lewis points out that there is "a lot of *poetry* in Faulkner, not all of it good," that occurs when the atmosphere is running thin:

> His characters demand, in order to endure for more than ten pages, apparently, an opaque atmosphere of whip-poor-wills, cicadas, lilac, "seeping" moonlight . . . and of course the "dimensionless" sky from which moonlight "seeps."

These properties, Lewis declares, are stored in a "whip-poor-will tank" and pumped into the narrative "in generous flushes" whenever the need is felt.

Apart from being an amusing creative fantasy, Lewis' criticism has a grain of hard sense. When, last spring, I had my students read *The Wild Palms* we paused over a sentence in which Wilbourne, the protagonist of the "Wild Palms" sections, speaks of something as "the mausoleum of love, [it was] the stinking catafalque of the dead corpse borne between the olfactoryless walking shapes of the immortal unsentient demanding ancient meat." This isn't supposed to be funny, but try reading it aloud and see how it sounds. Lewis found *Light in August* "full of wearisome repetitions . . . long-winded to the last degree . . . hysterical and salvationist . . . comical where it is not meant to be." Faulkner, he said, had written "A gigantic 480-page Morality" in which the novelist may be seen "delecting himself with, and turning to good library-sale's account, scenes of chopping, gashing, hacking and slitting." More recently Flannery O'Connor (in a fine comment quoted by Karl) called *Light in August* "a real sick-making book but I guess a classic." One would like to encounter more of that "I guess" feeling in Karl's many pages about the novel in which he finds it to be "among [Faulkner's] most profound commentaries on race" and that it "has cut directly across a profound American theme of identity—who am I? what role do I play? how do I find myself?"

It may be that Faulkner, like D. H. Lawrence, is the sort of writer you encounter at one point in your life (maybe in your twenties) and

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who takes absolute possession of you.[4] Returned to years later, such writers never quite live up to their original, remembered glory—at least so far as that glory entailed intimations of profundity. What remains is not inconsiderable—the marvelous observation, the voices rendered in conversation, and, as already mentioned, the humor. But Faulkner wanted to do something more, wanted—as he once told Malcolm Cowley—"to put everything into one sentence—not only the present but the whole past on which it depends and which keeps overtaking the present, second by second." About that aspiration, Hugh Kenner has written the best paragraph I've come across in all Faulkner criticism:

> A writer with ambitions of this order cannot but grow obsessed with ceaseless Time: the time that takes away syllables as they are uttered, eroding all possibility of that one polyvalent word; that consumes antecedent actions, compelling him to retrieve them by raids on the past; that consigns the vivid actual to myth; that segments and scatters and blurs and consumes all those lives, volitions, passions whose pressure on the momentary *now* lends it the meaning he sets out to capture—at what cost, in what serial stratagems. For the show of analysis, the show of syntax, are stratagems forced on the Symbolist by Time. Faulkner was neither an analytic nor a syntactic thinker, but a teaser into words, into sentences, paragraphs, chapters—all necessary, all unwelcome—of what was, to start with, a simple unverbalizable pulsating impulse.

That is one way of putting it, in the process of which Kenner manages to sound almost like the Faulkner whose style he is evoking. Another way was Faulkner's own, in a letter written late in his life to his former lover, Joan Williams:

> And now I realise for the first time what an amazing gift I had: uneducated in any formal sense, without even very literate, let alone literary, companions, yet to have made the things I made. I don't know where it came from. I don't know why God or gods or whoever it was, selected me to be the vessel.

Karl's biography does nothing to dispel this—the really important—mystery, and that at least is all to the good.

[4] At my Ph.D. oral exam I was asked by Prof. Alfred Harbage about my chosen author, D. H. Lawrence, whether I could name any other "great" writer who, like Lawrence, often wrote badly. When I produced the name of Faulkner, Harbage laughed and laughed and changed the subject.

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GEORGE CORE

Vessels of Consciousness

> Experience is never limited, and it is never complete: it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web . . . suspended in the chamber of consciousness.
>
> I never see the *leading* interest of any human hazard but in a consciousness (on the part of the moved and moving creature) subject to a fine intensification and wide enlargement.
>
> —Henry James

JOSEPH EPSTEIN'S *PARTIAL PAYMENTS*,[1] his second book of literary essays since 1985, stands as one of the best collections of criticism to appear in the past year—a time that has seen the publication of collections by Jacques Barzun, William Maxwell, the late Richard Ellmann, and other distinguished critics of culture and literature. Although Mr. Epstein sees himself more nearly as "a man who takes a deep pleasure in good books, who views reading as a fine mode of acquiring experience," than as a literary critic, he is one of our finest critics as well as a cultural commentator of great perceptiveness and subtlety. At the risk of belaboring the obvious, I will observe that Epstein is also one of the best essayists now regularly writing personal reports; that his occasional short stories—some of which have appeared in this magazine—are markedly above average; and that his distinguished editing of *The American Scholar* long ago made its readers forget the uninspired—but lengthy—editorship of his immediate predecessor. All of this is to say that Joseph Epstein does nothing in the literary vein with his left hand. He is, with Tom Wolfe, Dave Smith, and a few others, one of that increasingly rare breed—the American man of letters—born after 1930.

Plausible Prejudices (1985) is essentially a series of dissenting reports about American literature, especially modern and contemporary writers such as Robert Stone, John Irving, Bernard Malamud, John Updike, Ann Beattie, Norman Mailer, Philip Roth, Cynthia Ozick, and Joan Didion. Mr. Epstein sees little in the last several decades of American prose that meets his high standards; he reports favorably only on earlier generations of American writers: among those figures whom he admires are Van Wyck Brooks, Edmund Wilson, A. J. Liebling, and James Gould Cozzens.

[1] PARTIAL PAYMENTS: Essays on Writers and Their Lives, by *Joseph Epstein*. Norton. $18.95.

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The new collection contains only a few dissenting reports—for example the balanced, if ultimately negative, accounts of S. J. Perelman and Walter Lippmann. As with his essay on Cozzens in *Plausible Prejudices*, Epstein attempts to rescue Somerset Maugham; he treats him very handsomely and incisively, as he did Cozzens. I am most surprised by the high marks he awards Maugham, Theodore Dreiser, and Tom Wolfe, most disappointed by his depreciation of E. B. White. Even though he is a Jamesian (James is the presiding spirit and intelligence of the book), Epstein mounts a powerful argument for Dreiser as the best novelist this country has produced. ("James is caviar, Dreiser a good boiled potato; one cannot live exclusively on caviar.") I would say that James, Melville, Hawthorne, and Faulkner are all greater novelists than Dreiser—and not merely because each man is a far greater stylist. But Mr. Epstein is far too shrewd a critic to avoid the issue of Dreiser's flatfooted style—not to mention Dreiser's deplorable habits ("the death of the party") and politics ("his politics, being despicable, are only worth despising"). His pithy and witty remarks about Dreiser's elephantine prose (Mencken "once remarked that Dreiser had 'an incurable antipathy to the *mot juste*,' but that ain't the half of it"), ravenous sexuality ("he used women as other men used cigars"), and simple-minded notions ("a psychopathic potpourri of prejudice and zeal," said W. A. Swanberg, whom Epstein quotes) will provide most readers, including Dreiser's greatest admirers, with cause for merriment—as well as a sensible perspective, wide and deep, from which to view his career and accomplishment as a writer.

This is Mr. Epstein's stock-in-trade, so to speak: he presents his critical commentary against a running account of the writer's life. He asks such questions as "Why did homosexuality seem . . . at the center of E. M. Forster's books but not at the center of Somerset Maugham's?" The questions he asks are almost invariably probing and probative and serve to reveal the essence of the given writer's career. I quote his question about the sexuality of Forster and Maugham because I think he proves his case in each instance, a case that I would not have thought could be made so convincingly for either author, especially Forster. Of him Epstein writes: "Can it be, though, that while Forster's novels are in no way patently homosexual, the impulse behind them is homosexual?" He answers himself by saying: "the novels upon which E. M. Forster's reputation rests now seem chiefly screens for their author's yearning for freedom for his own trapped instinctual life"; and "the chief impulse behind Forster's novels, with their paeans and pleas for the life of the instincts, was itself homosexual. . . . The effect of this is to render [his] novels obsolete, and in a way that art of the first magnitude never becomes." With the exception of *A Passage to India* I believe Mr. Epstein is right. Although I don't share his enthusiasm for Maugham, I agree that he remains very readable; and I like Epstein's remarks about Maugham

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and modernism—for instance Maugham "wrote dead against the grain of modernism, with all its difficulty, preferring instead to write as plainly as possible about complex things." ("No one can accuse the modernist writers of not keeping critics gainfully employed," he adds, adverting to the critical establishment that has largely ignored or deprecated Maugham.) In contrast he sees Waugh the novelist as a modernist—"a master of irony, of decisive reticences, of abrupt juxtapositions of material that today seem cinematic." Yet, as Epstein points out, "as a man, Waugh came more and more to hate modernity."

The essay on Waugh may be the best of an excellent lot. I don't see a weak piece in the collection, and for one reason or another I have reread many of them, including "The Outrageous Mr. Wu" (on Waugh), "One Cheer for E. M. Forster," "E. B. White, Dark & Lite," "Tom Wolfe's Vanities," and "Mr. Larkin and Miss Pym." The essay on Philip Larkin and Barbara Pym ("literarily, and spiritually, the two writers were as brother and sister") is one of Epstein's most sustained and best performances. He begins with some general observations about England, especially postwar English culture and the contemporary literary scene, because both writers, as he remarks, are "quintessentially, untranslatably, English." He goes on to develop a detailed comparison between the two writers and friends: "If any two writers can be said to occupy the zone where art is not invaded by politics, Barbara Pym and Philip Larkin are those writers." "Each, in her and his respective line, marched quite alone." "Part of the appeal of Barbara Pym and Philip Larkin is their solid common sense. Not a quality in notably abundant supply among writers of our day." Throughout *Partial Payments* the author makes other illuminating comparisons: Chekhov and Tolstoy, Arnold and Eliot, Perelman and Benchley, White and Thoreau. Such acute comparisons—some obvious, others not—provide one essential tactic in this critic's battery.

Mr. Epstein's love of metaphors and his aptness in striking them make for a lively style. Of Walter Lippmann he writes: he "seemed perfectly equipped to be what in later years his readers took him for: a machine built for dispensing disinterested opinion." Of Lippmann's biographer he observes: "With a life so elaborately intertwined with public events as Lippmann's, Steel has his hands full merely laying the carpet, without attempting to find the figure in it." Of Santayana he says: "Boundless and boundary-less, he roamed free, all of Europe his demesne, like a Henry James character from the late period with all the Jamesian sensibility, but without any interior conflict requiring resolution." He is also good at skewering clumsy metaphors. Of Chekhov he observes: "It will not quite do to say that these stories represent 'a slice of life,' a grossly inept metaphor, since life, as you may have noticed, is no pie." But he is quick to quote others who have coined good metaphors, such as V. S. Pritchett, who said of Forster: "He looked like a whim." Epstein's favorite metaphors seem to derive

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from card-playing. He observes of Santayana: "He loved his father, whom he could not admire, and admired his mother, whom he could not love. Two interesting cards to be dealt so early in life."

One of the pleasures of reading Joseph Epstein's criticism is savoring his shrewd generalizations about literature, the literary life, and the literary marketplace. Several canny observations about style appear in *Partial Payments*, of which this may be the best: Waugh "knew that style . . . was the great preservative of literary art—that which allowed it to live beyond its time." Epstein is equally shrewd about the importance of point of view and belief in art. "To be an essayist is to divest oneself of the belief in a set or system of ideas. All the great essayists . . . are not so much anti-philosophical as a-philosophical." In this book, as in his collections of personal essays, he comments intelligently on teaching: "Sad to admit, but a sign of great literature may be that it cannot be altogether successfully taught. Confronted with masterworks, pedagogy does not stand mute—never mute—but awkwardly inept." Epstein is at his wittiest and most acerbic about the excesses of contemporary criticism: "A semiological study of Woody Woodpecker is the wave of the future," he remarks in comparing contemporary critics to disadvantage with Matthew Arnold, a great critic, as he makes plain.

I have so few reservations about this superb book that it seems churlish to mention them. The order of contents eludes me, except for "Matthew Arnold and the Resistance" and "A Boy's Own Author," the first and last essays. (The latter, a lovely tribute to John R. Tunis, is one of the most engaging pieces here.) The occasional slips in syntax (dangling modifiers), in diction (cant usages for such overworked words as *masterful* and *crucial*), and in usage (journalistic style) are baffling in a writer otherwise so careful and exact. The book, like *Plausible Prejudices*, should have an index for readers like myself who will return to it more than once.

My prejudices may not be so plausible as Mr. Epstein's, but nevertheless they are close to his. I think him slightly off the mark on Tom Wolfe, whom he thinks our best journalist: in my book that honor goes to John McPhee. I disagree with him about Dreiser, as I have said; I think that he overrates Evelyn Waugh (especially *Sword of Honour*), whom I too relish at his best; I believe that he doesn't quite do justice to White as an essayist and writer of children's stories, even though he proves his points about White's melancholia and his politics.

Joseph Epstein's admirers include one reviewer who wants to know what he thinks of "every writer who has ever lived." This absurdity has a nugget of sense. I would like to have his reports on Henry Mayhew, Joseph Mitchell, Winston Churchill, V. S. Pritchett, William Trevor, and the greatest novelist of the present time—Patrick White. Regardless of what writers he chooses to consider, I will be reading his

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new accounts of "the personal drama of the writers who wrote the books," and I urge you to do so.

Of his—the critic's—job he has written: "One remarks upon an unappreciated writer here, lets the air out of an inflated reputation there, combats a literary tendency one finds pernicious, or calls to the fore an essential but neglected tradition." "None of this," he continues, "is trivial work. Done well it is important in and of itself; gathered together, it can add up to something of significance." He wrote this in *Plausible Prejudices*; it proves even truer of *Partial Payments*.

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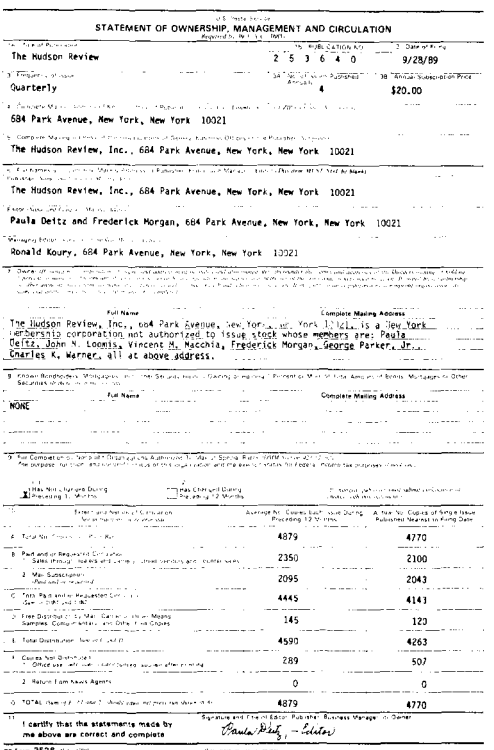

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WENDELL BERRY's essay that appears in this issue will be included in his new collection, *What Are People For?*, to be published by North Point Press in April . . . . CARL WOOTON is a professor of English at the University of Southwestern Louisiana. . . . CARL DJERASSI, professor of chemistry at Stanford University, is the author of two recent books of fiction: *The Futurist and Other Stories* (Macdonald, London); and *Cantor's Dilemma* (Doubleday), which is based on a short story first published in *The Hudson Review*. . . . DAVID DOOLEY* works as a legal assistant in San Antonio. His first book of poems, *The Volcano Inside*, was published by Story Line Press. . . . DICK ALLEN guest-edited the *Crosscurrents*' Winter 1989 special issue on "Expansive Poetry: The New Formalism and the New Narrative." . . . ROBERT McDOWELL is the author of *Quiet Money* (Holt), and the publisher and editor of Story Line Press. . . . JOYCE CAROL OATES is the author most recently of the poetry collection *The Time Traveler* (Dutton). She lives and teaches in Princeton, where she co-edits *The Ontario Review* with Raymond Smith. . . . Last year ROBERT SCHULTZ received *The Virginia Quarterly Review*'s Emily Clark Balch Prize for poetry.

While in the Far East last summer, MARCIA B. SIEGEL gave a two-week workshop on dance criticism at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, and lectured at the Cultural Center of the Philippines in Manila. Earlier in the summer she gave a one-week course on "Looking at Dance from the Sixties to the Eighties" at the Finnish Theater Academy in Helsinki. . . . CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK teaches English at Williams College. . . . JOSEPH FRANK is a professor of comparative literature at Princeton University. . . . GARY KRIST's collection of stories, *The Garden State* (Vintage), won the 1989 Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction, awarded by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. . . . EMILY GROSHOLZ is at work on a third book of poetry, a book of critical essays, and the manuscripts of the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz. . . . ANDREW HUDGINS, author of *After the Lost War* (Houghton Mifflin), is currently the Alfred Hodder Fellow at Princeton. . . . GEORGE CORE's "Shakespeare in London," a theatre report written with Susan Core, appeared in the Summer 1989 issue of *The Hudson Review*.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

It is readily evident, once affection is allowed into the discussion of "land use," that the life of the mind, as presently constituted in the universities, is of no help. The sciences are of no help, indeed are destructive, because they work, by principle, outside the demands, checks, and corrections of affection. The problem with this "scientific objectivity" becomes immediately clear when science undertakes to "apply" itself to land use. The problem simply is that land users are using people, places, and things that cannot be well used without affection.

—Wendell Berry, "An Argument for Diversity," p. 537.

My father and the three whores walked in together. He even held the door open for them. I hadn't seen him coming. He must have been parking his car while Garland and I were watching the women carry on out in front, and he just happened to walk up at the same time the whores arrived at our door. I remember someone telling me once that luck is just a matter of timing.

—Carl Wooton, "All in a Day's Work," p. 549.

As for the tongue thickened by liquor, we won't be hearing the last of it, since this was a life drenched in booze. When in his later years Faulkner was asked—by the polite, courteous Japanese students at Nagano—about his drinking, he replied that drinking was "a normal instinct, not a hobby . . . a normal and healthy instinct." The discreet Japanese let it drop there.

—William H. Pritchard, "Sound and Fury," p. 685.

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